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BLUEPRINT

A NEW CHAPTER OF COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

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ON THE COVER

Students struggle with college admissions during COVID

Cover Design: Zoe Edelman and Sabrina Agazzi

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Meet the New Principal: Eric Shawn

After Travis Bell's retirement from public education, the District chooses his successor

Sabrina Agazzi and Julia Poole | Graphics Manager and Blueprint Coordinator

As an unprecedented school year comes to a close, the summer and the 2021-2022 school year promise a fresh start with many new beginnings, including the arrival of a new principal at Acalanes.

After Principal Bell announced his retirement from public education on March 1, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Administrative Council announced Eric Shawn as his successor on April 14.

In order to determine his successor, the AUHSD Administrative Council carefully assessed each applicant to vet and select the new principal.

"The position was posted and input was gathered from stakeholders regarding the qualities they are looking for in the next principal of Acalanes. We had almost 20 applicants and screened that to five with application review, alignment to criteria, and reference checks," Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson said. "The five were interviewed by multiple panels of staff and parents. The finalists were then interviewed by the AUHSD Administrative Council, and additional reference checking took place. The Governing Board appointed and met Mr. Shawn during the closed session of their Board meeting on April 14."

According to Dr. Nickerson, it did not take long for Shawn to become a top contender for the position. His strong leadership skills and instructional experience stood out to the Board.

"Mr. Shawn rose to the top during the process. There were other strong candidates, but we believe Mr. Shawn will be the best fit for the needs of Acalanes. Mr. Shawn will bring a commitment to all students at Acalanes to optimize their high school experience. He is a strong community and instructional leader," Nickerson said.

Shawn grew up in Walnut, Calif., a suburb of Los Angeles. As an undergrad at the University of California, Santa Barbara he majored in the History of Public Policy. Shawn then attended San Francisco State University where he received his Single Subject Teaching Credential in Social Science. He taught World History, US History, and American Studies at Washington High School in Fremont. Shawn then furthered his education at the University of California, Berkeley to obtain an administrative credential and Masters in Education.

After receiving his administrative credential, Shawn became the Dean of Students at Alameda High School. Shawn held many responsibilities at the school, which included creating a safe school climate and culture.

"I was tasked with implementing restorative justice practices and developing school climate and culture initiatives to improve our student's connection to school, to their teachers, and each other," Shawn said.

After his Alameda position, Shawn became House Principal at James Logan High School in Union City. For the past six years, Shawn provided oversight to the Special Education, Science, and Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) departments at James Logan High School. He also coordinated technology infrastructure and facilitated the health and wellness initiatives at the school.

Shawn hopes to continue these roles and create an academically supportive and wellness-focused school climate for all Acalanes students and staff.

"[My goals are to] facilitate professional development for our teachers to continue to develop their leadership and collaborate on effective instructional strategies, powerful curriculum, and an inclusive school and classroom climate and culture," Shawn said.

At Acalanes, Shawn will also focus on expanding principal Bell's initiatives for school-wide mental health and wellness support.

"[I hope to] expand on our wellness work to provide mental health supports, mindfulness practices, and provide the space to process and embark on deep learning regarding the societal inequities that affect us all," Shawn said.

This matter of student health and wellness will be an especially high priority for Shawn as students and staff transition to return to school fully in-person by the 2021-2022 school year.

"I plan to work diligently to ensure when our students return to full time in person school that we support our students' and staff's health and wellness. We must honor our experiences, our grief and challenges from the past year of the pandemic and create the space to process what happened, what we've learned and how we will move forward together," Shawn said.

Shawn looks forward to building upon and getting to know the Acalanes community.

"I am most looking forward to getting to know our community, celebrating the amazing creativity of our students and staff, and doing all I can to ensure we continue to do extraordinary things," Shawn said.

Courtesy Photo/Eric Shawn

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District Projects Return to Full-time In-person Learning in Fall 2021

The AUHSD Governing Board Votes to Proceed with Fully In-Person Models for Fall 2021

Marisa Guerra Echeverria, Erin Hambidge, Lyanne Wang, Gabriella Gruber, and August Walker | News Editor, Opinion Editor, Feature Editor, Online Shadow Editor, and Staff Writer

As yet another unconventional, COVID-stricken school year of Zoom meetings draws to a close, a new school year in the fall opens up a vast range of opportunities for a hopeful future of in-person learning. With numerous concerns to address, including student mental health and learning loss, the following months are crucial for the District to plan the steps necessary for reopening in the 2021-2022 school year.

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board voted unanimously on April 14 to reopen schools in a fully in-person model by fall 2021, leading to an array of new district-wide measures and a mixed response from the Acalanes community.

Background

Before the Governing Board meeting, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated their physical distancing guidance for K-12 schools on March 19. In this update, the CDC recommended that, with universal masking, students may maintain a distance of at least three feet in classroom settings rather than six. The update spurred an instant reaction from community members, as some saw it as a green light to open schools with full capacity, combining both in-person cohorts A and B in a full-time instructional model.

However, even before receiving any public feedback, District members took the initiative to see what changes they could presently implement in classrooms.

"When the County health, CDC, and then the California Department of Public Health changed the guidelines for in-school distancing from six feet to three feet, we immediately as a staff at the District office looked [to see] what that meant for us and if we should be making changes," AUHSD Associate Superintendent of Education Aida Glimme said. "The leadership team here quickly went into action to see what the possible effects would be, so before any parents [and] community members said anything, I went down to Acalanes [and] actually picked a couple of the smaller rooms to see what it [would] take to actually move the desks three feet apart."

In response to parents' continuous outcries for a more regular full-time instructional model, the Governing Board held a meeting on April 14 to discuss potential changes. During the Open Session portion of the meeting, community members expressed their opinions over whether students should return to school in a four-day in-person model.

Individuals commented on the proposal for students in Cohorts A and B, who are currently on-campus for two days a week, to attend school four days a week while students in Cohort C, currently in fully remote learning, would stay online to finish out the 2020-2021 school year.

"The idea is that everybody would come four days a week, and the [Cohort C] kids would stay remote… as a teacher that's getting a lot closer to what we [usually] do, [fully in-person]," English, French, and Drama teacher Catherine Challacombe said.

Benefits of going back in May 2021

During the Governing Board meeting, an overwhelming majority of the parent community expressed support for the proposed model. Nearly all individuals came to a consensus that in-person learning is far more effective than any sort of hybrid or remote learning, and some expressed their concerns about how distance learning detriments students' social and emotional wellbeing.

"The experience of being away from school for a full year was terrible for most students - educationally, socially, and emotionally… You could double the amount of engaging, effective instruction, and social opportunities if you let cohort A and B kids attend together," District parent Dr. Elizabeth Owens said at the meeting.

In addition to District parents, several students saw the benefits of a fully in-person learning model by citing mental health concerns during isolation.

"The effect the pandemic has had on mental health at this point for kids could possibly be a lot more damaging than the risk of going back to school," sophomore Abby Drake said.

Another common concern about delaying the return to full-time in-person learning is the inability to test the full-time model and work through possible problems before fully reopening the next school year.

"The worst thing that could happen is we don't go back to four or five days until August and then we go back in August [for the new school year] and we don't have the kinks fixed. We need to get that done now when there isn't time pressure," District parent Wayne Hill said at the meeting.

Advocates of the new proposal also pointed out that several other Northern California school districts, including San Ramon Valley, Tamalpais, and Palo Alto, succeeded in shifting to four or five days a week in-person classes.

"Both the [California Department of Public Health] and the CDC recommend increasing capacity, why not us? It's worked in other places," Hill said at the meeting.

Detriments of going back in May 2021

While other school districts accomplished this shift, some District members stated that the proportions of students who chose to return to in-person learning are not the same in all districts.

"Parents had contacted us to say, you need to reopen because other districts have done it… Unfortunately, many of our parents don't know the intricacies of the opening plans of other districts," Glimme said. "At Miramonte, we have 85 percent of our students back, [and] District-wide it's 65 percent. But you know, San Ramon [County] is at 27 percent with one of their high schools at 8 percent [of their students] back [in-person]. You just can't compare that. They don't have a live-stream model. They don't have Cohorts C which we're doing, so you can't really compare that."

Additionally, several teachers hope that parents will consider the amount of time and effort staff already put in to accomplish the shift to hybrid learning in March.

"I just don't think that unless you've lived it, the amount of effort it took just to get the classroom set up [and] the amount of work that Mrs. Powers and the custodians [did] with measuring and figuring out how we configure

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rooms and bathrooms," Challacombe said. "I don't think that anybody understands that level of work. I don't think they understand how hard it is to engage with kids when they are on Zoom and when you have another group of kids that are in the classroom and that we're constantly having to sort of reshape what we're teaching."

For teachers and students alike, executing any major change surrounding learning methods takes planning, which is why some people feel that the District should not rush the decision to fully open schools with such little time left in the school year.

"We don't just make a decision on what we're teaching a day before [class]. For some people, they've planned [since] last summer for this whole year, and they had to constantly readjust with the constant disruption to our plans. It's just too late in the year," Challacombe said.

This change would also heavily impact the District's remote learners. Some students in Cohort C feel that the proposed model of grouping Cohorts A and B together would prove alienating and even detrimental to their online learning experience.

"If there are more students in class, I can see how it'd be a lot harder for teachers to manage all of the students in class, as well as teach [the] students online. So I do think that maybe, even if it's unintentional, there would still be a bit of inequality in terms of attention and support," Drake said.

Combining the two cohorts would eliminate many of the teaching strategies that teachers have employed. For example, combining both Cohorts A and B into a pattern of daily in-person instruction would rule out the "flip-flop" teaching method of flipping interactive class activities for online and in-person cohorts to keep all learners engaged. This is concerning for many teachers, especially the majority who base their curriculums around this flipped method of teaching.

"Teachers would lose an instructional strategy [flipping lessons] which has been a huge part of my physics classroom. Second, with more students in the room with teachers, I was very concerned that the fully remote cohort would be further disengaged and very hard to serve well," Appel said.

With finals and Advanced Placement (AP) tests fast approaching, many teachers worry that another sudden change to student's schedules would prove stressful and difficult.

"Both distance learning in fall 2020 and the hybrid schedule in spring 2021 took months of planning, countless meetings, a week of training for staff, and a huge amount of effort and time by both classified and administrative staff. Given all

Blueprint Photo/Emma Uffelman

that, the transitions, while I feel [were] ultimately successful, were still hard. We just don't have the time left in the school year to make another transition and do it well," Appel said.

Aside from scheduling concerns, the District fears that going back to in-person learning for four days a week would create too many risks, as some students currently struggle to follow the safety protocols.

"When we first reopened, our administrators were going around going, 'be six feet apart, stay six feet apart' and the second we go away the kids are like 'they're gone, we can come back.' It is just human [nature], we're magnetized toward each other. So that's really where we're [struggling] not other places in the classroom where it's super easy to follow. We're following [COVID-19 protocols] with the screening, with the masking, with everything else. It's really just the [lunch] that we're struggling with," Glimme said.

Ultimately, many staff felt like the limited time constraints and insufficient preparation provided enough reason to postpone a fully in-person model until next year.

"I think if this decision was happening in January, where we would have enough time to fully research and prepare for a shift, then I would fully endorse a new model. However, without that time, and not knowing how the fully remote learners will be affected, it was better to stay the course for the year and not have another disruption with only a few weeks left in the school year," Appel said.

Progress in Fall 2021

After reaching a similar conclusion, the Governing Board plans to gradually transition into a fully in-person model for the fall semester of the 2021-2022 school year through a series of measures.

To facilitate the transition from nearly a year of distance learning and to address potential learning loss, the District will provide a robust set of summer bridge programs. The three programs, which are available to targeted groups of students throughout the District, will emphasize high school preparedness, credit recovery, and social-emotional learning.

The first program will center around high school preparedness over three weeks and will be invite-only for several incoming freshmen. It will specifically aim towards providing academic and social-emotional support building up to a high school level for the upcoming school year. Participating students will also receive 5 elective credits upon completion.

"In this three-week program, our vision is a core group of teachers delivering instruction every day in their core subject area with things that pertain to high school readiness, [such as] the reading skills required for their curriculum. And, we have a vision for some guest speakers coming in, like our college and career advisors, introducing themselves to our students. So, we have some social-emotional [learning], but it's all geared around high school readiness," Associate Superintendent of Administrative Services Amy McNamara said at the meeting.

The next bridge program is an updated version of the traditional AUHSD summer school for credit recovery and will provide academic support specifically for struggling students. It will have a flexible in-person attendance policy and distance learning schedule for students traveling throughout the summer. Staff will teach in-person classes while remote-learning days will progress through FuelEd, the digital summer school platform employed in the summer of 2020.

"So our teachers [will deliver] this [credit recovery] curriculum, we would require two days a week per person; but if students needed more, we would have a [staffed] on-campus learning center at both sites where students who need daily assistance can go.[We can also have] some flexible attendance with the FuelEd program as long as [students are] demonstrating progress," McNamara said at the meeting.
school setting before starting the school year.

Finally, the extended orientation program will speak to the community's concerns about student mental health by providing lowerclassmen social-emotional learning opportunities in

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Staff Welcomes New College and Career Advisor

Acalanes Hires New College and Career Advisor: Debbie Levy

Andrew Habas and Sammy Lee | Copy Editors

Almost every high school student has thought about where they want to go to college or what they wawnt to do after high-school. However, many of these students don't know where to start when it comes to the process of preparing for their future careers. For many students, a great College and Career advisor may be one of the keys to their future and discovering their passions in life.

Debbie Levy assumed the position of College and Career advisor in March 2021, inheriting an influential role in student futures.

The job of the College and Career advisor is to build a foundation for students to work on their future plans, potential career paths, and the process of college applications.

While college applications may be hard and stressful for many students, Levy promises to support students through it every step of the way.

"I help students figure out which schools they might be interested in. I help students figure out if they are going to college. I help them with their common application essays. I help them fill out their applications. I willI will work with them as much as I can and help them figure out the next best path," Levy said.

Levy has an extensive educational background that has given her the necessary skills and experience to aid students as they plan their futures. This is especially important as she is in charge of helping hundreds of students find their right fit after high school, whether that be college, a gap year, a two year college, or other alternative paths.

"I was a tutor for fellow students when I was in high school, I think that was the first experience for me with helping others succeed academically," Levy said.

Levy's career in education began after she graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Once Levy graduated from UCSB, she did not embark on her educational career right away, but it did not take long for her to realize her true calling.

"My first job out of college was selling copiers door to door and I ended up at a tutoring center. They purchased a copier, but I was able to see the students really engaged and I knew that's where I wanted to be and I ended up being the director of that center for five years," Levy said.

More recently, she worked closely with public and private school students as the local director of a national tutoring, test preparation, and college counseling center in Lafayette.

Levy now holds a crucial position at Acalanes, and she feels excited about holding informational events to ease the stress of the college application process.

"I look forward to offering student and parent information events, as I know how overwhelming the process can sometimes feel. Helping students figure out their career or college path is my main priority," Levy said.

In addition to college counseling, Levy will provide students with multiple resources, including volunteer opportunities, jobs, and helping them build an efficient path after high-school.

"I am really focused on helping students be more involved in the community. And I really help students find volunteer activities that they're inspired to do," Levy said.

Overall, Levy is passionate about helping and inspiring students to find their future calling.

"I love hearing the ah-ha moments where they find out they really want to study global health for example, or some new pathway that they haven't seen before. I just love seeing them get super excited about learning new things," Levy said.

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Erin Barth: Teacher of the Year

Erin Barth earns the title of Acalanes Teacher of the Year for 2020-21 School Year

Haley Rurka and Saylen Cardoni | Business Manager and Staff Writer

From navigating Zoom meetings and facing technical difficulties to managing the transition from distance learning to hybrid, teachers faced many obstacles this year. Educating a classroom of high schoolers is never easy, but the past year proved this statement especially true.

During her five years at Acalanes, English teacher Erin Barth has become a distinguished and esteemed educator, earning her several nominations and the title of Acalances Teacher of the Year for the 2020-2021 school year.

From a young age, Barth was immersed in academia. Her father worked as a science professor at the University of California, Berkeley and during his tenure, Barth explored the classroom setting.

"My dad, from the time I was born, was getting his PhD and he taught at Cal. He was a science professor. I was always in his classroom and his lab playing around" Barth said.

Although she constantly spent time in the classroom, Barth only realized she wanted to become a teacher after she left the University of California, Davis.

"The minute I graduated from undergrad, I missed school. I realized I [wanted] to be a teacher and that I could be in education always," Barth said.

During her time at UC Davis, Barth studied both English and history. However, she ultimately decided to focus on English for numerous reasons.

"I felt like it could be a different class day-to-day year-to-year because it's bringing in new novels and teaching different things, and so there seemed like more of a variety and I really liked that," Barth said.

Although she did not have a singular source of inspiration, Barth explained that her former professors supported her while she earned her teaching credentials. She also adopted some of their teaching techniques and currently employs them in her classroom.

"One thing I try to do in my classes that my professors modeled for me is [to] always give the historical context and the purpose. The 'why we're doing what we're doing' and 'what that will look like and where it takes us'. I try to bring in interesting facts about the time period or the author to keep students engaged," Barth said.

Blueprint Photo/Emma Uffelman

In the fall of 2016, Barth began her career at Acalanes as an English I, II, and III teacher after teaching at Woodcreek High School and Roseville High School. Even before teaching at Acalanes, she was very familiar with the area and enjoyed its atmosphere.

"I had friends who went to Acalanes when I was in high school and my sister lives in Orinda, so I was very familiar with the district and Acalanes High School and knew it's where I wanted to be," Barth said.

Despite her short tenure at Acalanes, Barth has had a tremendous impact on her students and the community as a whole. Students convey that her teaching style pushes them to strengthen their comprehension skills and apply their new knowledge to the world outside of the classroom.

"Rather than simply leaving the books 'on the page', me and Ms. Barth will dive into the lessons the book explains about the real world and how, through the process of reading and hearing others' perspectives, we are able to increase our empathy," senior Carly Arends said.

Her unique teaching style allows for a fun and creative workspace, motivating her students to stay on track and engage in a rigorous curriculum.

"I like being very playful with my students. I like them to be out of their desks and working in small groups, moving around and being active," Barth said.

In her classroom, Barth strives to find the balance between a lighthearted and academically engaging space. The colleagues who nominated her for the award praise how Barth achieves this balance and how her students find themselves fully immersed in the class content.

"Everyone just thinks she's absolutely fantastic and when they walk out of [her classroom] they don't just say 'oh she's really nice'. They say 'she's really nice, and a really good teacher because I learned so much'. I think it's hard to get that combination. It's like you don't even know you're learning so much because it's such a pleasant experience," Social Studies and AP Comparative Government teacher Joseph Schottland said.

Barth's distinct and interactive relationship with students allows them to engage in a nurturing academic environment.

"I think what makes [Barth] such a good role model is her ability to listen and go beyond her obligations as a teacher. She takes the time to get to know who she's teaching and teaches in a way that will keep students attentive," sophomore Riley Baker said.

Like many teachers this year, Barth had to reshape her curriculum around the distance learning model. Barth faced this challenge head-on and helped her students through the transition.

"[Barth] has put in countless hours refiguring the normal coursework to work in the online format and refiguring it again after receiving feedback from the class. She has taught all of us as students how to 'roll with the punches' and be flexible, allowing our challenges to become strengths," Arends said.

Barth's capability and overall persona earned her four nominations for Acalanes Teacher of the Year from many staff members and colleagues. Among the four includes Schottland, who works alongside Barth in their English and History threads class.

Schottland explains that Barth's additional contribution as a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) helped Acalanes staff overcome various hardships during the many changes in the academic year, including managing Zoom and adjusting to the new online educational platform, Canvas.

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Full-time In-person Learning in Fall 2021

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a high school setting before starting the school year.

"It would be sort of a July-August program and its emphasis is really social, emotional learning, small group activities, social activities… I would think of it as almost an extended orientation. The large focus would be on our ninth and tenth-grade students. [They are the ones] who really just don't have a sense of our school cultures and need to get on campus, need to mix with each other, need to meet and greet each other. So that would be the social-emotional component and how we would address it," McNamara said at the meeting.

To further address the topic of student mental health, the District will expand upon the Wellness centers to promote social and emotional wellbeing for all students.

"We are expanding what resources we have in our wellness centers, how many staff members [they will need], and for how long because we don't know what kind of mental health support all of our students are going to need," Glimme said. "[Wellness expansion can be] for those that are struggling being back full-time or those that haven't been back at all so that we can provide them with mental health support."

In addition to these supports for in-person and remote students, the District will create a separate virtual learning program, the Virtual Academy, for students who will continue remote learning into Fall 2021.

"Because we can't make all [distance-learning programs] in the four [schools] robust, we decided to put it under one district-wide Virtual Academy. So if you wanted to go to that, you would transfer out of our comprehensive school sites into the Virtual Academy," Glimme said.

As for in-person students, for the 2021-2022 school year, the District looks to implement the regular block schedule used in the 2019-2020 school year while considering current state and County regulations.

"Right now we're in some planning meetings, like my master scheduling and staffing and our facilities, we're planning as if it's current rules, that you have to clean and [social-distance] and so on so that I can have enough teachers and we can just move forward. Because if anything, [the regulations will] loosen up, and then that's okay. But what we're hoping for is that we're not constantly changing schedules and guidelines," Glimme said.

Another challenge in reconfiguring next year's schedule is deciding whether or not to keep the positive highlights and safety measures from the current hybrid schedule. These benefits include keeping the social equity and mental health lessons from the Cohort Academies and maintaining staggered Academy periods to reduce in-person capacity.

"We have the option that everything stays the same under a regular schedule, but keeping the Academy staggered to lower the density during Academy or during lunchtimes. Or we could keep some aspects of the Cohort Academy, or implement either social [and] emotional health for curriculum or for student [support] and equity lessons because, otherwise, we lose a positive piece of this schedule that we didn't have [before]," Glimme said.

In the process of building this schedule and encountering curriculum shifts from this school year, the District will hire more Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) to reinforce future curriculum and help students readjust to a full-time instructional environment next year.

"...We've increased the number of TOSAs in each curricular area to help teachers realign the curriculum work with the teachers at the start of the year [and] do professional development because what we don't want is for [students] to come back to the school year and kind of go back to heavy-duty [work]. We need to adjust the curriculum and then examine who needs support and help," Glimme said.

Despite all of the changes in the coming school year, many teachers remain optimistic to see their students in person and embrace a new school year no matter the challenge.

"What I want is to come in at the beginning of next year, and have that feeling of excitement that you get at the beginning of the year that we are together, working on things as students and teachers, that sense of community that you just don't get under [this year's] circumstances," Challacombe said.

Barth: Teacher of the Year

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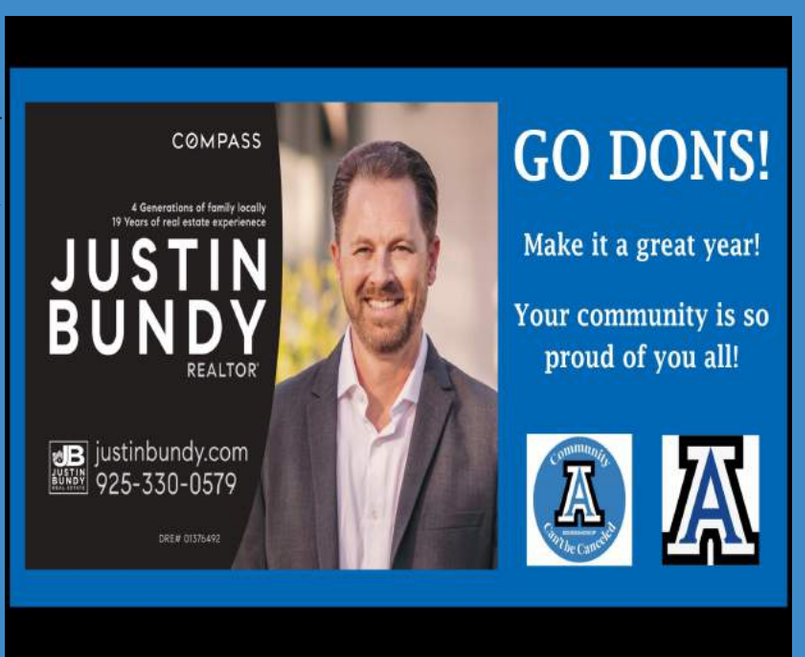
"I think as a colleague to everyone else at this school, acting as TOSA in terms of … helping out with the conversion to Canvas which could have been terribly traumatic for teachers, she made it far less so. She worked tirelessly to help teachers adapt to both a new situation in terms of online learning but also a whole new learning platform of Canvas," Schottland said.

Throughout the many challenges and transitions in the past academic year, Barth provided support for her fellow colleagues and students while simultaneously making the transition herself. Barth's presence in the Acalanes community helps to create a positive atmosphere for students and teachers alike.

Schottland explains that Barth's additional contribution as a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) helped Acalanes staff overcome various hardships during the many changes in the academic year, including managing Zoom and

"I think that a marquee school like Acalanes should have a critical mass of great teachers. She is very much part of that critical mass. Subtract her from that mass and I think it would downgrade the school," Schottland said.



Year-End Events Signal The Return of Student Life

Leadership students plan to host COVID-safe school festivities to finish off the 2020-2021 school year

Connor Faust and Griffin Ruebner | Feature Editor and Sports Editor

Many students over the last year have yearned for one thing: a return to normal life. Numerous people have not met with friends, gone to school, or held social gatherings. As COVID-19 restrictions ease up, Acalanes Leadership has prioritized filling the social void left by 2020's lockdown.

After a long year of distance learning, Acalanes has started holding COVID-safe events to end the school year on a high note.

The first event was homecoming week, a time-honored tradition at Acalanes. Although homecoming festivities normally take place at the beginning of the year, the school postponed them due to the pandemic. Administration and Leadership later rescheduled them for the week of April 25.

"This year, homecoming is going to be a little different than usual. We are not allowed to have the dance this year and the rally will be pre-recorded instead of in the gym with everyone in attendance. This year we will still be doing hallway decorating and skits, but skits will be shown in the virtual rally instead of done during the rally," sophomore Class President Sierra Lashinsky said.

Leadership worked tirelessly around administrative requirements to create a familiar yet refreshing experience for students.

"We worked really hard to make sure that we could have a skit that was socially distanced with 12 people per dance, and filmed completely either outside or in the gym with only a certain number of people in the gym at a time… Similar to how we did the skits, we've done events with shifts and Sign-Up Geniuses. We made sure that we could have two hours for each person who wanted to come and restricted it so that the hallways weren't too crowded. But everyone still got a chance to be part of the homecoming community," senior Class President Bella Gladden said.

Homecoming festivities have always served as a way for students of all grades to come together and create positive memories.

"I think [homecoming is] for tradition, but also it brings people closer together. It helps bring the community together and grow something for more people to look forward to when they come here. I think a lot of it is mainly about school spirit and getting everyone involved," sophomore William Stancik said.

Embracing the traditional theme of community in homecoming festivities, organizers also emphasized planning exciting events while keeping everyone involved healthy and protected.

"We definitely made sure that we chose events that had the most community feel, and [had the] most, classic homecoming [feel] our top priority is making sure that we could still have them all being safe," Gladden said.

For many end-of-the-year events, safety stands as a major hurdle in the planning process. Though Leadership kept many of the homecoming events similar to years prior, senior ball required some major changes to remain within COVID-19 safety guidelines.

"Right now, you can have 100 people at a gathering. That's what the county health guidelines state. So, admin and I just looked at all the events students wanted to do, and made sure what I was putting into place

Blueprint Photo/Arlyne Noguera

met that [expectation]," Leadership Advisor Katherine Walton said.

In abiding by these restrictions, the administration will still hold an adapted version of the senior ball on May 15.

"We will have a food station on the football field with some really great lighting and food trucks. And then casino tables that we've used in the past and music, and that'll kind of be station one. And then another station will be in the senior deck, which is kind of unusual, but [there will be] a DJ with the stage and lighting on that grass part, which I think will feel really intimate, and not [restrict] dancing [to] the football field, where it's only 100 kids. The third station is going to be in the big gym so [we can have] anything from bumper cars, to mini-golf, to arcade games," Walton said.

While the ball will be different from previous years, seniors are thrilled that administration will hold the event at any capacity.

"I am super excited for the senior ball… I know Leadership is working very hard to make this last stretch of school very fun for all students and teachers. I am very thankful for their effort and stoked to be part of such an amazing school district," senior Austin Kinnear said.

To cap off the school year, Acalanes will continue its tradition of sending off the senior class with a graduation ceremony. While last year's seniors did not get to experience a normal graduation, this year's will be one step closer to pre-pandemic graduation at Acalanes.

"Based on where we are with county health and our numbers, it will be an in-person graduation on the football field. Maybe in cohorts kind of like from prom, maybe in a couple groups, but definitely in-person, and definitely live-streamed to limit audience numbers. Whether that's fully live streamed, or [we have] students in-person and students get a couple of tickets, I'm not sure," Walton said.

Over the past year, the Acalanes community has faced countless challenges. However, many view the revitalization of traditional events as a shining light at the end of a confusing and unorthodox year.

"We've gone through so much as a class already that I'm hoping that it just makes it feel a little bit more normal. We still can come together and bond as a class one last time," Gladden said.

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A New Chapter of College Admissions

In the wake of COVID-19, students struggle to navigate the application process for higher education

Connor Faust, Griffin Ruebner, Zack Lara, Lulu Milnes, and Saylen Cardoni | Feature Editor, Sports Editor, Liaison Editor, Staff Writers

The idea of college represents different things for different people, be it a chance to work towards a dream job, a place to grow into adulthood, or a possibility to find one's life interest. Amid the many opportunities higher education has to offer, one struggle remains present among achieving the college experience: college applications. Unfortunately, the pandemic presented a set of unique challenges to this year's college applicants.

As a result of quarantine restrictions, seniors battled an incredible number of obstacles in the 2020-2021 college application process.

When California first initiated statewide lockdowns last spring, schools shut down on short notice. Due to the amount of learning both students and teachers underwent to adapt to the new distance learning setup, Acalanes decided to make second semester grades pass/fail rather than letter grades.

"Last year, all of us seniors had to lose out on our grades of our second semester of our junior year, which is probably one of the most important if not the most important semesters of your high school career. Everyone saw that, and realized that it made our first semester of our senior year incredibly more important. I think more time plus a bigger emphasis on that first semester of senior year all contributed a little bit [to grade inflation]," senior Harry Mannering said.

Some teachers had trouble adapting their in-person testing styles to distance learning while maintaining academic honesty, contributing to the issue of grade inflation.

"In my class, of course [grade inflation] is something I have control over, because I make the grades. That said, I still think there is grade inflation. For some of the assignments, especially early on when there wasn't in person testing, there was grade in-

flation due to the fact that there was a tremendous amount of cheating, group work, and unsanctioned communication [that] inflated the grades," history teacher Joseph Schottland said.

Following the switch to online learning in March 2020, schools struggled with the issue of grade inflation, which is the awarding of grades higher than students deserve that subsequently yields a higher average grade. In the fall semester of 2019, the average grade point average (GPA) amongst students in the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) was 3.30. A year later in the fall semester of 2020, the average GPA was 3.37. This change in GPA average is much greater than the grade fluctuations of previous years.

When large numbers of students with straight As apply to colleges, colleges have to rely more on extracurricular activities and letters of recommendation for students to stand out. Additionally, grade inflation lowers the value of an A at specific high schools, so As at different high schools have different values. The inconsistency of letter grades causes colleges not to rely on grades and GPAs.

Colleges previously evaluated academic prowess with standardized tests such as the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT). However, the pandemic caused some colleges to shift away from their traditional reliance on standardized testing. Many colleges chose to go 'test blind', meaning they did not require SAT or ACT scores in applications this year, leaving colleges with few options beyond general GPA metrics during the application review process.

"The increase in colleges adapting to test optional and test blind for ACTs and SATs and the uncertainty of the pandemic have led to the rise in competition," independent college counselor and founder of Eppinger College Counseling Anna Eppinger said. "Many colleges have received an increased number of applications overall, especially highly-selective schools, because it is much easier to apply without an ACT or SAT score."

On a local level, many testing centers shut down when lockdowns intensified throughout Contra Costa County. In order to sign up for an SAT or ACT test, many had to look beyond the local area, and few could retake their SAT or ACTs in the case they got a low score.

"I took the SAT late in the summer. I had to go all the way to Sparks, Nevada to take my test. I wasn't able to do it in California. There were so many delays and the stress of studying for something that you don't even know you are going to take is daunting," senior and varsity football player Hunter Ridley said. "You have so much on your mind and you're driving four to five hours away just to take a test. It adds pressure. It's a very scary feeling to be somewhere just to take a test and putting it all on the line."

The wave of colleges changing their application requirements affected students who planned to use their high test scores to make their applications stand out. On the other hand, poor test takers had the option to not show their test scores, boosting their overall application.

"I was kind of banking on using a higher test score, trying to push into a University of California (UC) I wanted to get into, but I didn't get lucky. That one test score wasn't enough, and I wasn't able to take another, so I had to settle for everything else," Mannering said.

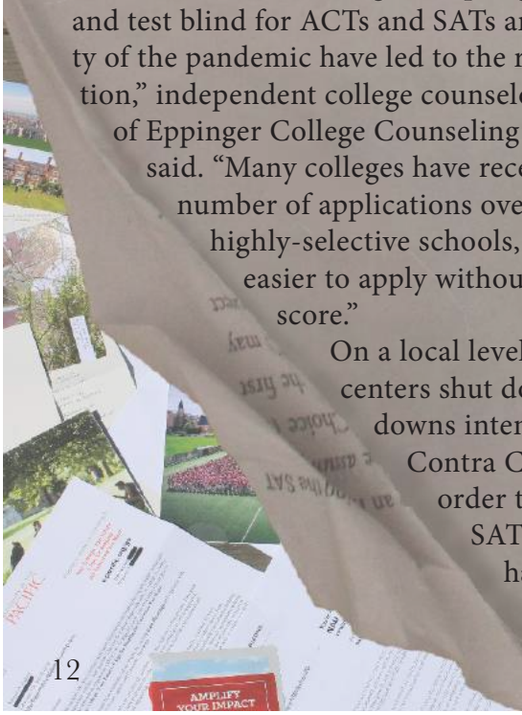
In addition to test-blindness, the College Board discontinued their SAT Subject tests and the SAT with Essay in late January. This removed another way for applicants to show their writing skills or academic abilities in specific subjects, increasing reliance on extracurriculars and letters of recommendation.

Advanced Placement (AP) tests in the past, served as a way for schools to distinguish the strongest applicants from the weakest. As schools focus less on ACTs and SATs, AP tests may become the new college application basis for standardized tests.

"I think that in light of the fact that [colleges] are not really looking at the SATs the same way, I think if universities have nothing to go from and all these grades are highly inflated across the country, they need something to distinguish one student from the other… I would speculate that they would look at an A in AP Comparative Government with a two on the AP exam and realize there is something off," AP European History teacher Ed Seelenbacher said.

In addition, AP tests are standardized across schools, allowing for a set level measurement of a student's abilities compared to less regulated grading policies. As colleges move away from standardized ACT and SAT testing, some people suspect that they will look towards the results of college level AP tests in order to measure a student's ability.

"They need something to go by that isn't subjective.



Whether you get an A at Acalanes versus an A someplace else, the quality of that A is going to be relative to the rigor of that particular school. They need some sort of touchstone that they can rely on, and they are not relying on SATs or ACTs for various reasons, so then AP tests would be something they will look long and hard on," Schottland said.

While GPAs generally set a baseline for a college application, and standardized testing separates moderate and high level students, additional extracurricular activities create a broader view of the student.

"[College admissions consultants] will look at GPA most importantly, read essays to understand what specific qualities the student has, [look at] extra-curricular activities, work experience, leadership, examples of showing initiative, community outreach, and rigor," Eppinger said.

Despite their importance, the pandemic heavily limited students' means to partake in extracurricular activities and job opportunities. Losing chances like these may damage some students' college applications, as it takes away elements that make applications stand out.

"It's weird, because every theater company has taken the pandemic in differently. I have some theater companies that I have worked with forever that completely shut down," Powell said. "A lot of opportunities out there just stopped all together."

While some states with looser health regulations offered more extracurricular activities in the heat of the pandemic, colleges recognize the struggles many students faced when attempting to find such opportunities.

"I think that colleges have to be understanding that particular kids coming from states that [were] more stringent in their COVID regulations were not able to access jobs or get out of the house for almost a year," Acalanes College and Career counselor Debbie Levy said.

Before the pandemic, many students had to be selective about their activities in order to stand out. This year, colleges will place a greater emphasis on extracurriculars in the absence of other application factors.

"It's not a matter of doing a ton of different things, it's a matter of showing passion and interest in a few things and going deeper," independent college counselor Susan Kjorlein said. "Colleges can see who a student is holistically by how they spend their time."

For many students, their defining extracurricular is a sport. Last year's lockdown forced halted all sports programs at Acalanes, projecting an uncertain future for incoming college athletes.

"The short sports season has made it challenging for sports recruiting with limited visibility for coaches and players alike. The fact that college senior athletes have an extra year of eligibility for sports has created a bit of a bottleneck for younger athletes trying to play at the next level," Eppinger said.

Athletes felt the pressure of getting their names out to colleges in a time where teams could not hold meetings and tryouts.

"Being locked down, and not being able to go to colleges and visit them, and not being able to have as many connections. It makes it a little hard, but I'm getting through it," Ridley said.

Specifically, difficulties regarding communication between recruitment programs and high school students created issues for student athletes.

"I know that the process was trickier than it normally would have been. A lot of athletes I know found the process difficult because they weren't allowed to have any in person communication, or see campuses in person either," senior and varsity lacrosse player Grace Gebhardt said.

Additionally, the lockdown hampered the ability for representatives from colleges to watch and keep tabs on high school athletes.

"The times that I interact with [college] coaches is usually at tournaments and that sort of thing, when they're watching high school games. They've been the ones that have been largely affected," varsity women's water polo coach Misha Buchel said.

Fortunately, several athletes were able to showcase their skills in some way to make the leap to collegiate play.

"I think we have players that are committed for next year… and we'll see where some of the other seniors end up. They're still deciding on what schools to attend. But we've been blessed with great talent, and it's been recognized by college coaches, and we've had players continue to play in college," Buchel said.

Like extracurriculars, letters of recommendation allow colleges a more complete view of a student. Teachers continued to write letters of recommendation for students this school year.

"I asked Mrs. Smedley, the English teacher, for mine, and I have been in her class for three years. I feel like

we know each other better than some other student teacher relationships… I think overall, I don't know anyone who didn't get a letter of recommendation because they had to ask through an email or through Zoom," Powell said.

Many seniors asked for letters of recommendations from teachers they have had in the past, which gives teachers an opportunity to write about their experience with the student, helping to give a better overall view of the student. Instructors note that they have methods other than in-person interaction to develop an impression of a student, and they recognize how vital this has been for writing letters of recommendations recently.

"More often than not, I get requests from students that I've had twice. So, even though, you know, I have them in the eleventh grade, and maybe via Zoom, I did have them already in ninth grade. I do get some from other eleventh graders that I did not have in ninth grade… So not having them or knowing them as well, I still can base it on conversations with them, I still know them well enough," history teacher Lyanne Denny said.

While the lack of in person class time did not affect this year's process for writing letters of recommendation, some teachers worry that next year's letter of recommendation requests may be more difficult.

"There's going to be an issue for next year's letters of recommendation because we don't really know those kids. It's going to be a problem in the future, when kids ask next year and you have no experience with them, that has an impact," Seelenbacher said.

Quarantine also posed challenges for students interested in college visits. While some campuses like Arizona and Alabama state allowed limited in person visits, many other colleges used virtual tours.

"I did not tour the college I am going to, but I did get to visit it and visit the town. I think it worked out for me, but some of the other cities I wanted to go to I have never been to, so that was kind of concerning. I don't want to say I am going to go somewhere that I have never been," Powell said.

For some students, these virtual tours failed to provide the same in depth experience of the culture of the college and surrounding area. Despite this, the situation the COVID-19 pandemic presented gave students few options besides the online experience.

"I've gotten a virtual tour of one, and it does affect it," Mannering said, "You can't really see the town, you can't explore it, you can't really get a feel for what you are jumping into, you just have to trust whatever the video the college sends you is. That's just not the same as an actual visit."

Despite the tribulations of the past year, students still have the opportunity to make their applications stand out and to give themselves the best chance to get into their preferred college.

"I have two pieces of advice for students. First, make sure to utilize all the opportunities Acalanes and our community offer to build your resume and life experience. And second, make sure you have a balanced and realistic college list that fits the interests and needs of you, the student. Show grit. Start a business. Work for a non-profit. Be a doer. Be passionate about something and make a difference in your life and in your community," Eppinger said.

Get to Know Next Year's ASB Representatives and Class Officers

Winning student candidates share their goals and responsibilities for next year

Aysha Craig and Helen O'Neal | Staff Writers

After hanging posters across campus, campaigning with students in person, and posting on social media, student government officers successfully ran in an election, and winning candidates now look to next year as an opportunity to voice the needs of the student body on campus.

The Acalanes student body elected four class officers within each grade, in addition to six Associated Student Body (ASB) officers for the 2021-2022 school year. Blueprint interviewed these students to share information about themselves along with their goals for the upcoming year.

ASB President: Franny Daughters

Blueprint Photo/Emma Uffelman

Next year's ASB President is Franny Daughters, former ASB Secretary, who is currently a junior and second-year leadership student. As ASB President, Daughters will coordinate major events for the student body, meet with administrators and community members, and oversee Leadership committees.

Along with representing the student body in school activities and meetings, Daughters is eager to work in close partnership with the Acalanes Diversity Board to ensure that Acalanes fosters an inclusive space for all students.

"Next year I definitely want to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion to make sure that everyone feels welcome and safe and happy," Daughters said.

Leading with a positive attitude, Daughters aims to create a friendly and enthusiastic environment that will reach all students on campus.

"I want everyone to feel like they have the opportunity to have a good year and that they feel connected to the school," Daughters said.

ASB Vice President: Emily Starn

Blueprint Photo/Emma Uffelman

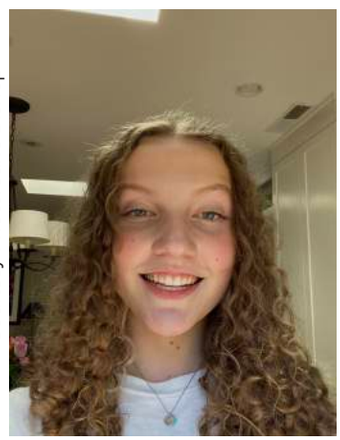
Emily Starn, a junior and second-year leadership student, is next year's ASB Vice President. As ASB Vice President, Starn will assist in supervising the Leadership class, coordinating club days, and supporting Leadership committees.

"My top priorities are finding ways to bring together the student body and to involve people in school events and activities," Starn said.

Starn plans to better the campus by focusing on areas that may allow students to feel better heard.

"I think the most important thing we can do to make our school community a better place is to focus on inclusivity and mental health," Starn said.

ASB Secretary: Jane Bishop



Courtesy Photo/Jane Bishop

Next year's ASB Secretary is Jane Bishop, who is currently a junior and third-year leadership student. As ASB Secretary, Bishop is responsible for recording minutes at formal meetings and ensuring that Leadership boards update and upload their meeting minutes.

Following the past year in distance learning, Bishop looks forward to re-establishing a sense of community with students and teachers in person.

"This year I learned and witnessed the value of a community and how it plays into our campus, so next year I plan to collaborate with local schools and businesses to bring a sense of unity within our city," Bishop said.

ASB Treasurer: Ava Spiegler

Blueprint Photo/Mara Korzeniowska

Ava Spiegler, a junior and third-year leadership student, is next year's ASB Treasurer. As ASB Treasurer, Spiegler is responsible for processing payments, tracking spending, and ensuring that Leadership boards stay within their designated budget limit.

Along with monetary work, Spiegler will dedicate time towards lifting the voices of all students at Acalanes.

"I think we should all be doing more diversity work and recognizing that people naturally have louder voices than others," Spiegler said. "As a representative of the school I feel like it is my responsibility to make sure not just the loudest voices are heard, but everyone's voice is heard."

ASB appointed positions:

ASB Social Secretary: Stella Bobrowsky

Courtesy Photo/Stella Brobowsky

The current ASB board and Acalanes Leadership teacher, Katherine Walton, appointed Stella Bobrowsky as next year's ASB Social Secretary. As ASB Social Secretary, Bobrowsky will coordinate all leadership bonding events for both students and teachers.

"I want to help create a great Acalanes environment by planning fun events both students and teachers can attend," Bobrowsky said. "I'm looking forward to hopefully having some type of school dance or rally next year with everyone."

ASB Public Relations Officer: Shrida Pandey

Courtesy Photo/Shrida Pandey

Both Walton and the current ASB board appointed Shrida Pandey as next year's ASB Public Relations Officer. As Public Relations Officer, Pandey will report at governing board meetings for Acalanes, manage Leadership social media accounts, and liaison for different boards in Leadership.

Pandey is eager to continue the equity work she began this school year.

"I am looking forward to working with the Diversity Board to try to revise school curriculum," Pandey said. "A change in curriculum can make a significant impact because it will increase equity and the diversity of our knowledge."

Senior Class President: Logan Ketcham

Courtesy Photo/Logan Ketcham

Logan Ketcham is next year's Senior Class President. Ketcham will represent the senior class and work with other class officers to plan events like the coming senior ball.

"My main goal is to get everyone involved and plan events that appeal to everyone so we have a fun year," Ketcham said.

Senior Class Vice President: Brooke Palma

Blueprint Photo/Mara Korzeniowska

Brooke Palma is next year's Senior Class Vice President. As vice president, Palma will work with other class officers to plan special events for the senior class and supervise participation in class competitions.

"My main goal is to connect with as many people as possible before we graduate. I want to create a fun environment for our senior class so they have something meaningful to remember," Palma said.

Senior Class Secretary: Rhett Skvarna

Blueprint Photo/Emma Uffelman

Next year's Senior Class Secretary is Rhett Skvarna. As secretary, Skvarna is responsible for working with other officers and assisting in the organization of events for the senior class.

Out of all events, Skvarna is looking forward to organizing prom for the senior class the most.

"I'm so excited to help plan prom because this will be the first time in two years that we will hopefully have a real prom that we get to go to and have a really fun time," Skvarna said.

Senior Class Treasurer: Katherine Montoya

Courtesy Photo/Katherine Montoya

Katherine Montoya is next year's Senior Class Treasurer and is responsible for organizing fundraisers, overseeing budgets, and working with other officers to plan senior events.

"I'm looking forward to planning fundraisers so that we can raise money to make events like prom the best they can be," Montoya said. "Fundraisers are beneficial in many ways including that they can act as bonding events for our class."

Junior Class President: Sierra Lashinsky

Blueprint Photo/Helen O'Neal

As next year's Junior Class President, Sierra Lashinsky looks to unite the junior class through planning and coordinating events and activities.

"My main goal for next year as an officer is to rebuild our community amongst the class of 2023," Lashinsky said. "This year I have learned the power of relationships and how everyone needs a support system and it is okay to not always be okay."

Junior Class Vice President: Sophi MacKay

Blueprint Photo/Mara Korzeniowska

Sophi MacKay is next year's Junior Class Vice President. As class vice president, MacKay will prioritize the needs and concerns of all members of the junior class.

"My top priority next year [is] that all the events that are planned and put together for the class of 2023 are what the whole class wants, not just what the class officers and I want," MacKay said.

Junior Class Secretary: Sara Archer

Blueprint Photo/Mara Korzeniowska

Sara Archer is next year's Junior Class Secretary. As class secretary, Archer will arrange and plan events for the junior class to bond through.

"My goals for next year are to unite the junior class and make sure that everyone can have the best junior year possible," Archer said.

Junior Class Treasurer: Portia Seymour

Blueprint Photo/Emma Uffelman

Portia Seymour is the Junior Class Treasurer for next year. As Junior Class Treasurer, Seymour is responsible for monitoring funding and spending as well as assisting other officers in planning events.

"My top priority next year is to make sure [that] our [class] money is well spent and goes where it deserves and that everyone has a say and a voice in that," Seymour said.

Seymour plans to utilize the skills she learned during her time in Leadership this year.

"I learned that you have to bring the spirit if you want others to show it themselves, you can't be afraid to put yourself out there," Seymour said.

Sophomore Class Secretary: Ella Thomason

Blueprint Photo/Helen O'Neal

Ella Thomason is next year's Sophomore Class Secretary. As class secretary, Thomason will collaborate with the other class officers to create enjoyable events for the sophomore class to attend.

"To improve the school community, I am going to work together with my other class officers to increase involvement through publicizing events widely that students are interested in, and making sure that all students feel welcome," Thomason said.

Sophomore Class Vice President: Olivia Williams

Courtesy Photo/Olivia Williams

Next year's Sophomore Class Vice President is Olivia Williams. As class vice president, Williams looks forward to creating an inclusive environment for the sophomore class where students can reunite aftvver a year of remote and hybrid learning.

"My top priorities are including those who stayed fully remote this year, to make sure that they also feel a part of the in-person class and experience because they didn't have that this year," Williams said.

Sophomore Class Treasurer: Monty Gumabay

Courtesy Photo/Mara Korezeniowska

Monty Gumabay is next year's Sophomore Class Treasurer. As class treasurer, Gumabay will keep track of the class budget and organize fundraisers.

Setting up fundraisers that appeal to all students is one of Gumabay's top priorities.

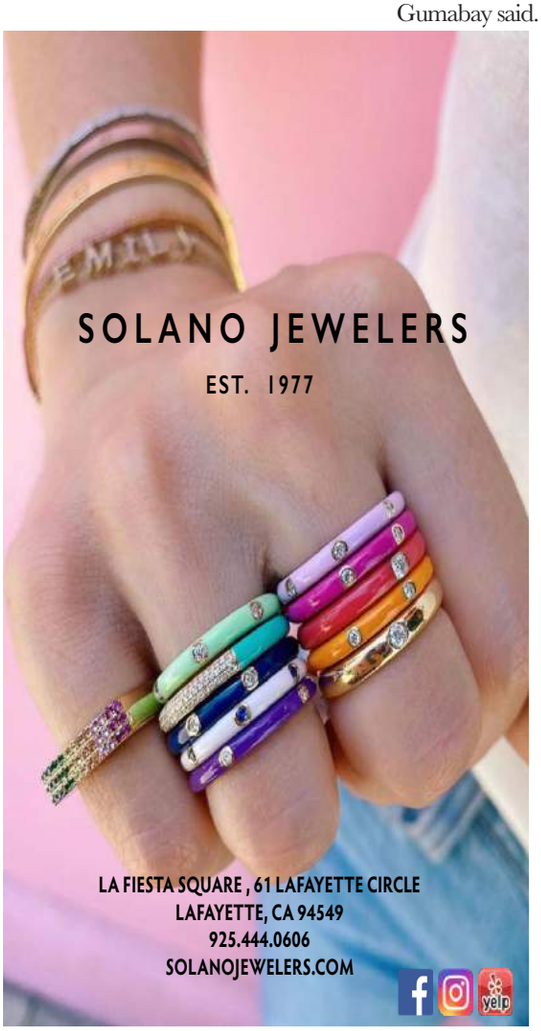
"My main goals for next year are to come up with ideas that people enjoy and put them into action, and to collaborate with my classmates to strengthen our individual ideas," Gumabay said.

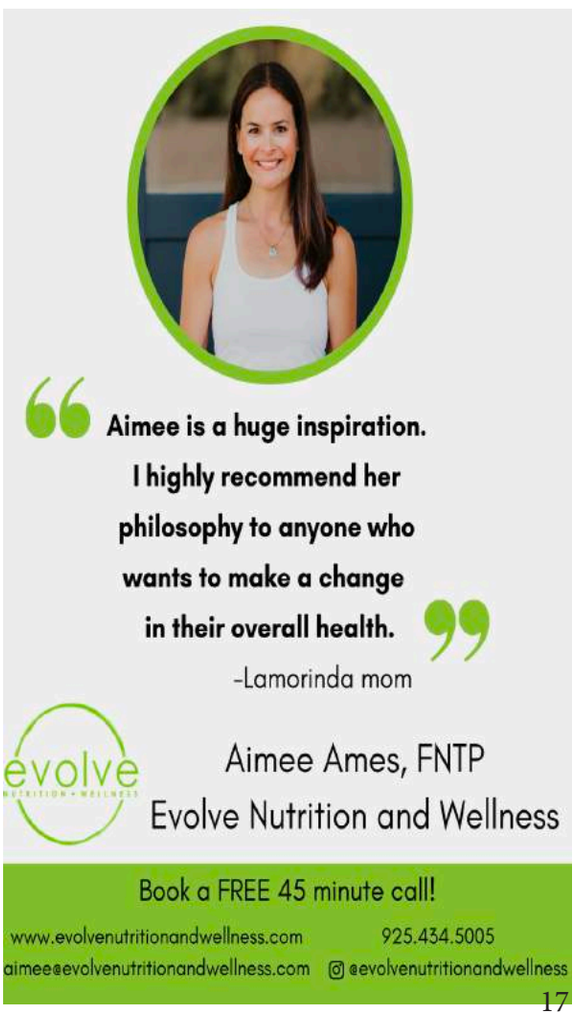
Sophomore Class President: Jenna Steele

Courtesy Photo/Jenna Steele

Next year's Sophomore Class President, Jenna Steele, will plan events to create an improved sense of community within the sophomore class.

"My main goals for next year are to help foster a good community in my class, especially since we missed out on so much of our freshman year," Steele said. "To improve our school community, I think I need to first start by improving the community in my class which I plan to do by hosting more in-person bondings next year."

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College Board Changes AP Tests

As May approaches, students and teachers wonder how hybrid learning will affect AP Testing

Catherine Lomond and Alex Ariker | Head Print Section Editor and Liaison Editor

For many Advanced Placement (AP) students, the month of May is synonymous with stress and anxiety. All year, these students learn in advanced, fast-paced classes culminating in spring AP tests organized by the College Board.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic derailed typical schooling, students learned in classrooms for five days a week; however, this is not the case for the 2020-2021 school year. As a result of the shift to online learning last March, students and teachers alike share concerns about AP testing, and many believe that most students will struggle with their exams given the atypical school year.

Before the pandemic, College Board administered AP tests on campus at the high schools students attended. The format of the tests depended on each course, but the typical AP test took about three hours and consisted of multiple-choice questions, free-response questions, and essay questions. However, this format changed following the move to online learning last spring.

Last school year, College Board administered all AP tests online during the beginning of nationwide lockdowns and subsequent quarantines. Acalanes students signed up for the test in the fall of the 2019-2020 school year expecting to take the regular tests under normal circumstances, but because of the new situation, College Board altered several tests to accommodate for the time in lockdown.

"Last year I took the AP European History test and we only had to do an essay portion which I felt was pretty reasonable," junior Kyle Thomason said.

This was a substantial change from the regular AP European History course test format, which usually consisted of 55 multiple choice questions, a short answer, a document-based essay question, and a long essay section.

This year, despite the increased dependency on virtual learning, College Board will administer most AP tests in their regular forms. Thomason expresses concerns with this due to the drastics changes in learning which took place in the past school year.

"Expecting a full-length test when the mode of learning has gotten worse is unreasonable. In all honesty, I don't think there should be any AP Tests at all this year," Thomason said.

For many students, focusing during virtual classes is extremely tough given the numerous distractions that surround them. This, in addition to reduced teaching time from the week lost during the transition to hybrid learning, often makes test preparedness unfeasible. Consequently, some AP students may choose to not register for AP tests at all; this decision may have been avoidable given this was a regular year.

Students are not alone in dealing with the effects of hybrid and distance learning. In the current hybrid learning model, some teachers find it difficult to teach material to two 'separate' classes at once.

"There is not just one way that I can create a lesson for a class. I have to think about how the in person students will learn best, versus the distance students, how I can do both at the same time, and if the two are equitable," AP Environmental Science teacher Jada Paniagua said.

This May, College Board is offering tests on campus at high schools as well as online at home. The fact that there are two different testing environments raises concerns over whether the fairness and security of testing will be the same both in person and at home. Many people believe that students who are taking the test online will cheat using their notes and textbooks without getting caught.

"When you are at home and there is no one to hold you accountable for your actions, the temptation is there to just get the good grade and get it over with rather than try to understand the material," junior Samantha Louie said.

Additionally, students in Cohort C, who account for 30 percent of the students at Acalanes, are at a disadvantage with AP tests due to their lack of in-person learning.

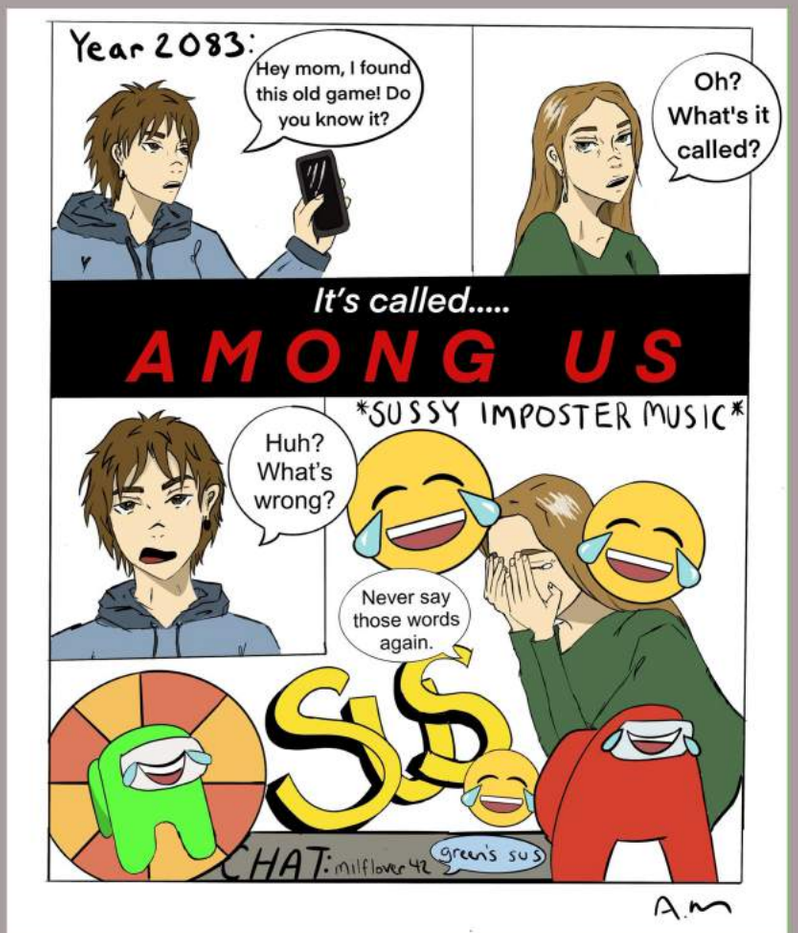
"[Students in Cohort C] haven't taken tests in person for a whole year so they aren't used to it," Louie said.

The unfamiliar testing environment and stress surrounding COVID-19 may further hinder the test-taking ability of students who have yet to return to in-person school.

College Board had the opportunity to adjust AP tests and prevent much of the stress and unreadiness that many students are currently experiencing, but they chose not to, leaving a multitude of students frustrated.

"[College Board] makes the tests, so they could make it easier if they wanted to or even cancel it but they want the money. They are going to cash in, give the tests, and collect their 100 dollars from every student," Thomason said.

Blueprint Photo / Julia Poole



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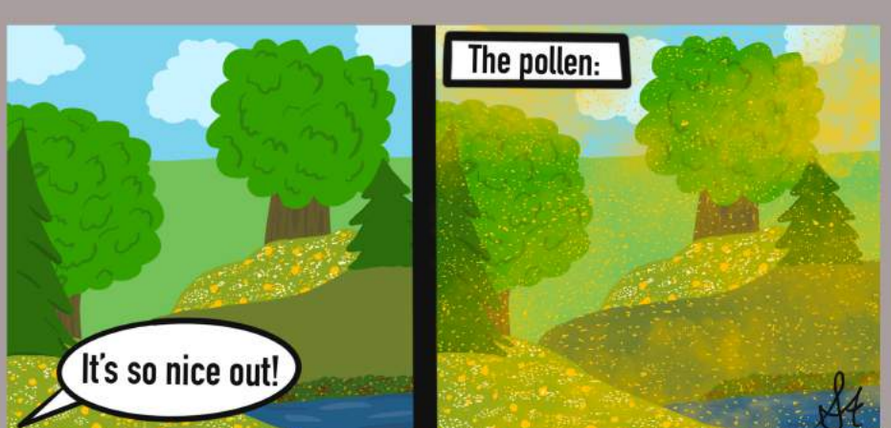


Sabrina Agazzi

Students and Teachers Say Farewell to Choir Director Bruce Lengacher

Lengacher's departure after 21 years of teaching leaves a lasting legacy in the Acalanes VAPA Department

Marisa Guerra Echeverria | News Editor

Through years of producing dazzling musical productions, conducting sweet melodies at holiday concerts, and participating in prestigious choral competitions throughout the globe, Bruce Lengacher set the basis for a distinguished reputation that will precede the Acalanes Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) program for years to come.

Following a 21 year tenure, choral director Bruce Lengacher will depart from Acalanes after the 2020-2021 school year to work within the Acalanes Adult Education Center.

Before becoming a choral instructor, Lengacher previously worked as a professional chef and a caterer to motion pictures. Throughout these careers, he remained passionate about music and even sang in the opening ceremonies for the 1984 Summer Olympics at Los Angeles.

After rediscovering his passion for music and settling down in the Bay Area with his wife, Lengacher went back to college at San Francisco State University to receive a musical education degree. Afterwards, he began to teach music to multiple elementary and middle schools before a job opened up at Acalanes, which he had previously visited in his college years.

"I always liked it when we came here to sing [and recruit students] when I was in college. It was a renowned program [and] there was a standard of excellence...And the first time I ever heard a choir from Acalanes was in a state music convention...and it was just, it was so mesmerizing," Bruce Lengacher said.

After becoming a teacher at Acalanes in 1999 school year, Lengacher went on to teach up to six choral programs yearly throughout his time at the school. In addition to high school choral programs, Lengacher also taught a junior choir for middle-school-aged kids called Nothing But Treble.

During his time teaching, Lengacher's choirs participated in annual competitions in the California Music Educators' Association (CMEA) and embarked on national and international musical tours, making memories and visiting locales such as Seattle, Paris, and London.

In addition to training and traveling with his various prestigious choirs, Lengacher also built upon Acalanes' celebrated spring musicals every year since his hiring in the year 2000, producing classic titles such as 2019's "Cinderella" and 2000's "Kiss Me Kate," to distinctly unique shows like 2020's "Urinetown" and 2018's "Mystery of Edwin Drood."

The fond memories Lengacher had of his high school musicals inspired him to devote himself to creating a similar experience for his students.

"All the time that I spent and the energy that I put into the musicals is because of my high school experience. I remember every show and every performance that I was in, and those are the things that stuck with me. Those are the things that I wanted to pass on to my students," Lengacher said.

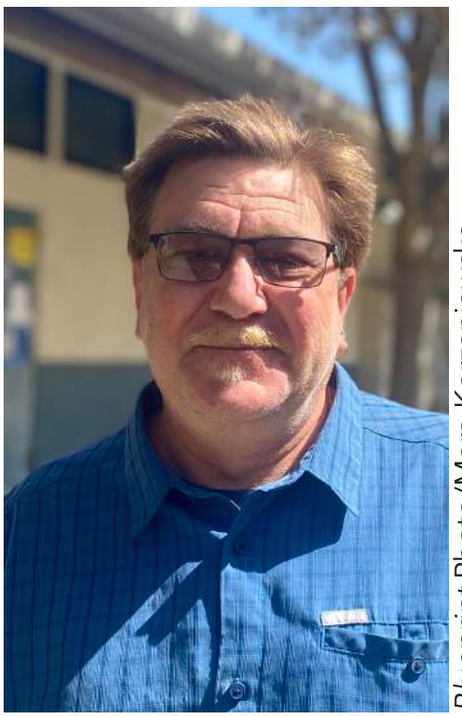
Through these musicals, Lengacher and his choral experience intersected many times with the Drama and Instrumental programs, often resulting in artistic collaboration within the entire VAPA department.

"Well, collaboration is what the arts are, like theater production. It's just a team and it's a collaboration and more minds make everything better...and as an artist, that's one of the things I love the most about working is collaborating with fellow artists, making art together, and art is a conversation between the artists and it's a combination between the artists and the audience," theatre teacher Ed Meehan said.

By way of musical productions, choral competitions, and choral community building, Lengacher left a tremendous impact upon all of his choir students. One example of this is his constant encouragement for students to express their voice and grow as singers without judgement.

"I didn't have any self-confidence going into [choir] and I would like to say that I have a lot of self confidence now... I've heard [people] say 'oh I would never sing in front of people because they wouldn't like it' and that's a totally legitimate fear. But being around Bruce has inspired me to not to feel that way…because I know that there's always going to be people to support myself and my growth," junior Jakob Anderson said.

Additionally, Lengacher's direction of the Acalanes choirs provided students with a sense of relief and community during their toughest and most stress-ridden high school days.



Blueprint Photo/Mara Korzeniowska

"Choir was like my home base basically....In high school it is really, really important to have a group of people that you have a strong connection with that are your emotional support... Choir was good for me [and] it was the highlight [of my high school career]," Class of 2020 alumna Stephanie Liu said.

On a mentor level, Lengacher's long tenure and rich choral and musical experience served as an inspiration for other musical educators at Acalanes.

"[Bruce] knows so much about all of the musicals...So just watching him work and taking us from week one to the show is incredible...And he can read students and figure out exactly what they need week to week, especially in his choirs...," instrumental director Lauren Gibson said.

Furthermore, Lengacher's encouragement and his intense passion in the arts inspired his former students to pursue the same career path.

"So Bruce was an example of an adult who made a job out of something that he loves to do... and that was a goal [I had] as I went to college... There's something special about finding a profession that makes you feel alive. Bruce was an example of that and he gave something to strive for," Class of 2000 alumna and founder of I Can Do That Performing Arts Center Shayna Ronen said.

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This Year's Unorthodox Oscars Ceremony

The Acalanes community weighs in on this year's Academy Awards

By Keith Johnson, Juliet Becker, and August Walker | Head Videographer, Online Feature Editor, and Staff Writer

Blueprint Graphic/Seth Kline

Every year, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) hosts the Academy Awards to honor the best actors, directors, and movies of the year. Also known as the Oscars, the Academy Awards are one of the most prestigious celebrations of cinematic achievements.

The 93rd Academy Awards aired on April 25, where artists performed live in the Union Station in Los Angeles. However, many studios pushed back films in 2020, limiting potential nominees. The nominated movies tackled a variety of issues, such as Alzheimer's Disease, racism and immigration, and anti-government protests. In addition, many of the nominated movies were lesser known films, due to a lack of open movie theaters.

"With a lot of films being pushed back by a year or so due to the pandemic, coupled with the fact that I hadn't been in a movie theatre for over a year...I've really missed a lot in terms of who should have and should not have been nominated," video production teacher Austin Briggs said.

Although the Academy had far fewer films to choose from, there were some positive changes this year. The pool of Best Picture nominees featured more diversity than previous years, with Judas and the Black Messiah, featuring a primarily African-American cast, as well as an African-American director and screenwriter. The film portrays the rise and fall of Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton, and features popular actors including Daniel Kaluuya and Lakeith Stanfield.

However, there is still a historic lack of diversity in the awards. For years, the Oscars failed to recognize the achievements of African-Americans, women, and other minorities in the realm of film.

"[The Oscars have] given awards to white people far more than people of color. I think they've been trying to be more equitable, but when the body of people that are nominating and voting on these awards are not a diverse populace, that's kind of problematic," drama teacher Ed Meehan said.

According to the LA Times, the AMPAS is made up of 94 percent white people and 77 percent men. This clear lack of diversity in the Academy places minorities at a disadvantage and results in the underrepresentation of winners at the awards.

One potential root cause of inequality in the Oscars is lack of diverse actors in movies as a whole.

"I'd like to see more trans folk, more people who are LGBTQ+ represented. It's not as much the [fault of the] awards as the industry itself representing all types of people," Meehan said.

Many criticize the Academy Awards for their lack of diversity, however, some believe it is inevitable because of the widespread racism in Hollywood.

"I'm dubious toward campaigns [criticizing racism in the Oscars], not because they aren't true, but it risks relegating racism in the film industry to the Oscars," Tunick said. "The problem, though it may partially lie with individual members of the academy, is structural, and is representative of the racist past and present of the medium."

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Recipe of the Issue: Chilled Chai Sugar Cookies

Erin Hambidge | Opinion Editor

Study. Sleep. Stress-bake more cookies than you can possibly eat. With finals just around the corner, we are all looking for ways to escape the mountain of schoolwork that only seems to be getting bigger. They may not guarantee good grades, but these chilled chai sugar cookies are the perfect treat after a long night of studying.

Ingredients:
Cookies:
½ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
½ cup vegetable oil
½ cup granulated white sugar
½ cup powdered sugar
1 egg
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 cups all purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
1 chai tea packet

Frosting:
½ cup softened butter
2 ½ cups powdered sugar
⅛ cup milk
½ teaspoon cinnamon

Directions:

Cookie: Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. With a whisk or mixer, beat the butter on high for one minute, then add the vegetable oil, granulated sugar, powdered sugar, egg, and vanilla. Continue to mix well until every ingredient is fully incorporated. Cut one chai tea packet open and empty the leaves (they should be very small) into the batter. Sift the flour, baking soda, and salt and fold into the batter. Refrigerate the dough for at least 20 minutes and then bake for eight to ten minutes. If you like slightly underbaked cookies like me, I recommend baking for seven to eight minutes.

Frosting: Mix the butter on high until light and fluffy, then slowly incorporate the powdered sugar. Blend in the milk until smooth. Add cinnamon to taste. Wait until the cookies are cool and then frost. Refrigerate for 30 minutes after frosting and serve cold.

Blueprint Photo/Erin Hambidge

Quote of The Issue

"But you can build a future out of anything. A scrap, a flicker. The desire to go forward, slowly, one foot at a time. You can build an airy city out of ruins." - Lauren Oliver

Kayli Harley | Online Editor-in-Chief

As the needle pierced my skin, I didn't feel suddenly safe or immune, but rather lighter, because I could finally move forward. There is no guarantee that the COVID-19 vaccines will keep us healthy, but at least we are progressing in a time that proves to challenge us.

For the past year, we have all searched for ways to move forward. Whether it be going for a walk after spending a week inside, picking up a new hobby, or simply getting out of bed, we worked to make each day meaningful amidst our grief, sadness, and anxiety.

We persevered. We came together under a shared struggle and started building with what we had. No one expected life to deal us this hand, but we are playing it anyway. That's the beauty of hard times, they reveal the strength beneath the surface we never thought to touch. It's because of that strength that we are still fighting and still trying as different pressures weigh us down.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have waited for the light at the end of the tunnel. Now, with vaccines rolling out and more of the population lining up to get them, we can begin to see that light flicker in the distance. It's our job to capture that scrap of light and illuminate the path ahead.

Blueprint Graphic/Zoe Edelman

Farewell to Lengacher

Continued from 20

Bruce's inspiration and encouragement towards students inspired many to connect with their choir roots throughout the years. Upon hearing of his departure, several dozens of Acalanes alumni and current students reunited in a farewell Zoom event to celebrate his career at the school on April 21.

This event, planned by Acalanes alumna Kara Mickas and Acalanes junior Jakob Anderson, gave generations of choir students a chance to reunite with Lengacher, bond over a shared sense of community, and say goodbye.

"[After hearing of Bruce's departure]...I reached out to all the group chats from [last year's] and the older choirs...and then siblings were able to figure it out [how to contact the] years before them. And then somehow we even got the class of 2000 and 2002 involved and there were a lot of connections... Somehow it all connected, [and it] worked out that we got a lot of variety and a lot of different years represented [on the Zoom to surprise Bruce]," Mickas said.

The event became incredibly nostalgic for both past and present Acalanes choir students, as students from all 20 years of Bruce's career came to wish him well and thank him for inspiration.

"To see that [Bruce] continues to make such an impact and that there's so many generations of kids that he has impacted [is] so cool. And it's really kind of my dream, as I've been doing [my] company now for five years and I think about, 'Wow, you know, this I'm at the start where we're impacting kids and we're making a difference. And one day...I'm going to see all of my students grown up... And it's kind of a beautiful circle of life," Ronen said.

In continuing the musical circle of life, Lengacher looks forward to resume his career of choral education at the Acalanes Adult Education Center within the Acalanes Union High School District.

"I'm actually still working in the district. I'll be...starting a choir for the Adult Education program...They only have one fine art option right now...So I'll be teaching a voice class, [a] musical theater class, a choir, and managing the theater room...So I'm really excited to be able to create something new, especially where there's a need," Lengacher said.

Although Lengacher will move on to grace other spaces in the district with his musical direction, Acalanes students can't help but miss his long-standing traditions and his synonymity with the Acalanes choir program.

"In my mind, when I first heard that Bruce was leaving, I actually thought that the entire program was just going away because Bruce is the program, he made the program. It didn't really make sense to me, [I thought] 'why is there choir without Bruce?'…[But] Bruce and choir are synonymous for me," junior Kyra Ariker said.

While the Acalanes community will certainly miss him, Lengacher will always cherish his time at Acalanes and will spread his passion for music to other individuals for years to come.

"[What inspires me to teach is] the reaction and the feelings that I got from performing and wanting to be able to provide that for other individuals…[Music] brings me such joy. And I know that for a lot of people, work is work, but for me, it never seemed like a job" Lengacher said.

Raya and the Last Dragon: A Beautiful Mess

Raya and the Last Dragon's lack of pacing and precision drags it down

Tom Bequette | Online Sports Editor

It's back. For what seems like the first time in forever, Disney released an original, animated movie, as opposed to their now typical sequels and live-action remakes.

Released on Disney+ on March 14, "Raya and the Last Dragon" has its merits but has significant story flaws which hold it back from being great.

Set in the fantasy land of Kumandra, which is heavily inspired by Southeast Asia, the movie follows Raya, Disney's first Asian-American princess. Raya, voiced by Kelly Marie Tran, is the princess of one of five tribes in her world. She is also the guardian of the mystical Dragon Gem, a stone with the ability to banish evil and bring people back to life.

Nammari, another princess, betrays Raya to gain the power of the gem, which leads to the Dragon Gem accidentally shattering. This releases a plague called the Druun upon the world, making its victims turn to stone.

Raya seeks out the only remaining dragon in the world, Sisu, voiced by Awkwafina, to help collect all the gem pieces. Once the gem is intact, Sisu can use her dragon magic combined with the gem to defeat the Druun and save everyone. They face many obstacles along the way, most prominently Naamari, who wants to uphold her tribe's reputation by being the one to defeat the Druun.

While the magical world of Kumandra is creative and fascinating, it falls into the common trap of many fantasy adventure movies. The amount of new information about the world is overwhelming for the viewer, and because of how much the movie has to explain, it uses lazy and un-original tactics to do so. This includes opening narration, which flagrantly violates the sacred rule of "show don't tell" and serves as a lackluster introduction into the world.

The movie also leaves interesting characters on the sidelines. For example, Boun, played by Izaac Wang, is a child who lost his family to the Druun. He owns a shrimp restaurant and is a lively and fun presence. Seeing his struggles of losing his family at such a young age would emphasize the sky-high stakes of Raya's quest and create emotional depth for the viewer. However, after a short introduction sequence, he is relegated to the background for the rest of the movie. The character reeks of lost potential, a theme which permeates throughout the movie.

The search for the gem also falls into the stereotypical plot contrivance of a MacGuffin quest, a common trope where the main characters search for an all-powerful item. A MacGuffin quest is a bland story-telling technique, but it can provide a way for the characters to grow and undergo development while participating in fun action sequences. However, considering how creative and daring many elements of the movie are, using such a generic plot device stands out and is therefore less forgivable.

The ending is also significantly underwhelming given the complexity of the plot and themes. The ending revolves around the idea that the main characters must trust each other. While this is an important message, once the characters accomplish this, all their problems disappear and their seemingly complex relationships dissipate into tight-knit friendships. It just isn't realistic.

On the positive side, the animation is picturesque, as Disney continues to innovate in that department. The water stands out as particularly realistic, compared to past movies when it appeared fake and lifeless.

The movie's action never feels unnecessary or forced, which helps keep the movie's pace from slowing down. The style of combat changes regularly, preventing the movie from boring viewers.

Additionally, Raya's character arc fully develops and it is satisfying seeing her slowly learn to trust her friends. She makes for a fun protagonist, as her interactions with her friends help flesh out her character as a whole.

Not all the characters shine though, for example, Sisu, while somewhat funny, does not fit the tone or mood of the movie. When the movie is about a life-and-death conflict full of betrayal and sword fighting in a far-off land, jokes about real world things like group projects tend to stick out. Disney tried to shoe-horn one of their trademark sidekicks into the movie, and it did not work.

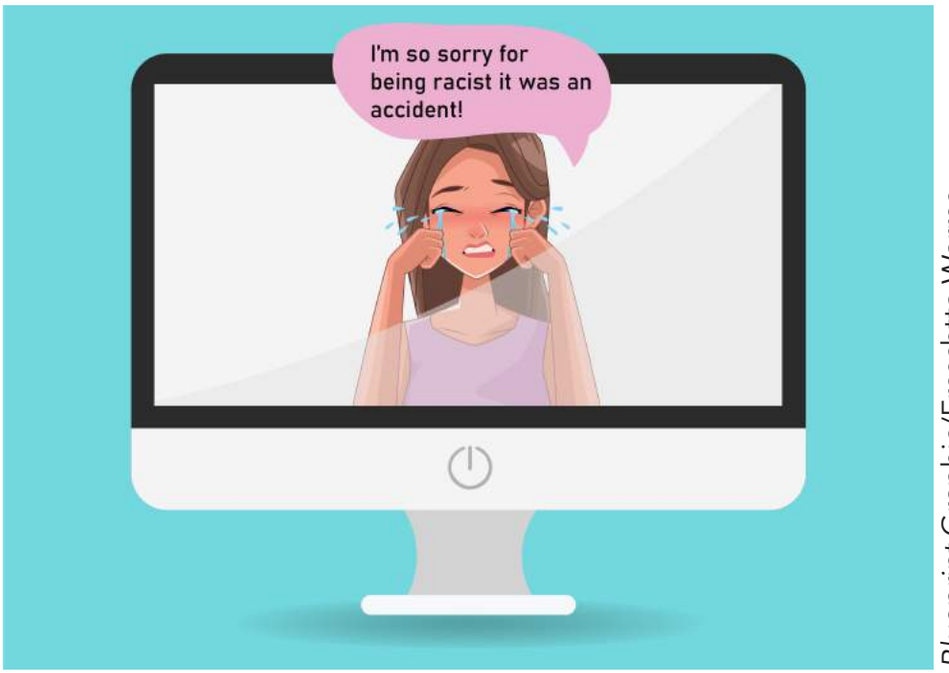
Overall, Raya and the Last Dragon is an exciting action-adventure movie with great animation and a captivating setting, but the plot and inconsistent tone hold it back from being anything special.

Blueprint Graphic/Freschtta Warres

The Downfall of Content Creators

Cancel culture and various allegations of misconduct gain attention in recent months

Zach Snyder, Brendan Connelly, and Nastia Grits | News Editor, Online News Editor, and Staff Writer



Blueprint Graphic/Freschtta Warres

The phrase "cancel culture" has become increasingly prominent in a more polarized and incredibly connected world. In the early months of 2021, many content creators faced accusations of sexual assault, racism, homophobia, and transphobia from fellow YouTubers and victims, becoming the forefront of social media news.

Content creators play a major role in the lives of many, especially youth. Because of their global impact and leadership, many viewers feel obligated to hold their role models accountable for their actions and attitudes. This leads to "cancelling" a creator: taking away the support for that individual because they did something offensive. A toxic online atmosphere in which audiences seek out creators to cancel often develops.

After a creator gains fame, a slew of jealousy ensues. Viewers, including haters and even supporters, begin to investigate the pasts of these new popular creators looking for controversial incidents to publicise.

"People may dig up things from Youtubers' pasts because they want to shed light on how they were not good people [prior to their fame]," sophomore Lucy Gellman said.

Typically, influencers who experience cancel culture encounter a mass unfollowing along with hate messages and widespread publicity about their actions.

In this current age of social media, creators can quickly gain and lose mass followings. In November of 2020, teenager Charli D'Amelio reached 100 million followers on TikTok after approximately a year and a half spent on the app. On the precipice of this milestone, she faced backlash from her viewers after releasing a YouTube video which many interpreted as rude.

"Any person who doesn't necessarily have controversy, but has a large platform will face scrutiny… People don't believe that she deserves the platform that she has," sophomore Sarah Gohres said.

In other cases, the public cancels media stars for legitimate and very consequential reasons. After some creators establish strong platforms, they acquire a sense of protection from consequences and repercussions.

"They think that they're entitled because they're rich and have a lot of fans. Creators begin to think that they can get away with things and that their immoral actions won't affect them. Whenever someone gains fame that fast, it's bound to impact their ego," sophomore Ava McGlothlin said.

In 2015, David Dobrik began his YouTube journey. After six years on the app, Dobrik gained roughly 18.5 million subscribers and an incredibly dedicated fan base. In the early months of 2021, Dobrik's "Vlog Squad" experienced an abundance of hate after accusations of sexual assault and rape surfaced against Durte Dom, a member of this group, who Dobrik supported and defended. YouTube demonetized Dobrik's channel, effectively resulting in an end to his career on the platform. Neither Dobrik nor Youtube could any longer make money from his videos.

Because Youtube makes more money from large creators like Dobrik, they may be more reluctant to demonetize him, as opposed to someone with a smaller channel.

"[For] people like David, because he has so many followers, it took YouTube a long time to take down some of these videos or hold them accountable, or demonetize him, while smaller creators are constantly getting demonetised for almost nothing," Gohres said.

Disputes over accountability, magnitude, and repercussions surface and often become content for other creators. Trisha Paytas and Ethan Klein have adopted cancel culture as their primary content for their podcast "Frenemies".

These two creators, especially Paytas, mediate the social media news, yet occasionally find themselves at the center. They, like many other creators, assume their mass following results in a pardon from their misconduct. Viewers constantly attempt to cancel them, but their supporters and entertainment value often outweigh the desire for accountability.

"I think Trisha is very problematic, even though she helped bring light to many of the issues, she still has a past of racism and some questionable actions," sophomore Alyssa Fong said. "I think she is able to get away with it because she is unbothered by what the internet thinks, and she covers up her scandals by talking about other scandals."

While some argue cancel culture is negative, others see the accountability aspect of it as beneficial. People see viewers and other creators taking action as a self filtering system working towards a better social media community.

"I believe in holding people accountable and helping to educate. Sometimes boycotting a celebrity or influencer's platform is the way for them to realize they need to change," Fong said.

Although cancel culture will likely continue to run rampant on social media, it is the responsibility of all users to make their own decisions as to how to respond to controversy.

"We blindly follow [cancel culture], we need to differentiate between someone who needs to be canceled and someone who just made a mistake," sophomore Juan Ruiz-Sagrero said.

Dramadons Perform Online

How the Dramadons adapted to virtual theatre

Juliana Upp and Jacque Peacock | Arts Editor and Business Manager

While Acalanes mourned the absence of sports this year, few paid attention to the loss of theatre and the potential toll it could take on aspiring actors, directors, and more.

After a year and a half since the last Dramadons performance in Oct. 2019, the advanced drama and stagecraft classes presented performances of Macbeth and A Midsummer Night's Dream on April 30 and May 1.

In response to the massive obstacle posed by the pandemic, the Dramadons adapted to create shows different from any other Acalanes production.

"To adapt, we did what a lot of folks did in some other disciplines. We tried to figure out the core tenants of what we're trying to do and see if we can do them," theatre teacher Ed Meehan said.

Each production lasted 40 minutes. Macbeth tells the grim story of an ambitious Scottish general and his wife who seek to fulfill their prophecies. A Midsummer Night's Dream weaves in mechanicals and pokes fun at love through a wedding, young intimacy, and a magical realm.

To ensure COVID-19 safety, the shows employed the unified space method. This method utilizes a technology team that superimposes socially distanced actors on to one screen.

The approach thoroughly impressed many audience members, as many had never seen anything like it before.

"I don't know how they did it, how they layered everyone on the screen and had everyone on a background. It was just amazing," frosh Steph Boustani said.

While working socially distanced, actors faced unique obstacles they may never encounter again.

"It's really difficult not having a stage and not seeing scenes play out in front of you. Instead, you're looking at a screen or you're looking at a wall. There are definitely a lot of challenges but I don't think any of them are [impossible] to overcome" senior actress Katherine Groszewski said.

Behind the scenes, senior Jonas Buchel was responsible for the technological side of the production. In his countless hours preparing for the show, several complications presented themselves. Buchel and his peers adapted to conquer these challenges over the span of a week.

"Tech week has been a struggle to work out all the kinks. It was a steep learning curve on Monday. This was the first time our actors had stood in front of a green screen and in front of a camera and had a standby person in the room… It was really hard" said director of Macbeth Isabel Powell.

Despite their inexperience with this approach, the Dramadons presented on a spectacular show. Their teamwork and support for each other shone through in both productions.

"Even though we wouldn't actually be in person together, I knew that just being a part of drama meant I would have amazing people to fall back on if anything went wrong. Even though we've lost a lot, we haven't lost the support that comes with being a part of the class and that makes me super happy," senior actress Ray Roberts said.

Acalanes Leadership supported the Dramadons by encouraging students to come to the on-campus tailgate and watch party they held. Leadership students served snacks, set up chairs and projected the live stream of Macbeth and A Midsummer Night's Dream. At the end of both nights, attendees enthusiastically applauded the productions.

"It felt really good to have a watch party. We were kind of just expecting everyone to be at home watching this and I think having people on campus enhanced the experience, especially because this was my first production. I'm really glad that my friends [got] to be here," senior actress Madison Payne said.

The unified space method fascinated watch party participants as they experienced it for the first time.

"I actually was pretty enthralled by the technology and the acting, knowing that they were doing it in their own space. They clearly had lots of rehearsals because it really looked like they were all together," leadership teacher Katherine Walton said.

Although the pandemic restrained regular theatre productions from taking place, the Dramadons' resilience allowed them to find a way to bring the community together.

"In the theater, we are people who adapt. Our job is to tell stories, to process, to come together and communicate, to explore, and continue to understand our own condition as humans. We figured out ways to do that. It took a while to sort it all out, and it's not completely sorted out, but God willing, we'll be back in the room together come the Fall in some way, shape, or form," Meehan said.

Courtesy Photo/Ed Meehan

Chef Xie's Trader Joe's Picks/Reviews!

Lizzy Xie | Staff Writer

Hi, hello. Welcome to the very last Snacks with Xie. It's been a very fun year writing about food, and I'm very glad to have shared all my crazy thoughts and feelings with you. With all these sad things said, I would like to announce that this is the very last, very final, Snacks with Xie! Drumroll please.

Trader Joe's is one of my favorite places in the world. The world could be on fire and I would stop by my local Trader Joe's first, because priorities. My reviews will be out of 10, with 10/10 being the best most amazing thing ever, and 1/10 being a no thank you. So without further ado, I present to you, Chef Xie's Trader Joe's Review! Enjoy!

Boba Ice Cream

7/10. Ice cream was delish. So good. The coffee flavor? Amazing. Love it. 3 points off because the ice cream was a little greasy. I'm attributing that to the fact that it's a coconut ice cream. (We will discuss later.) Also, the boba was not soft and chewy like other boba ice creams I've had. Overall, give it a try. It's good. The coffee and boba combination always works. I would buy it again.

Almond Butter Almonds

5/10. This one was disappointing, guys. It took me three weeks to finally get a hold of them, only to realize they're quite mediocre. Let me explain. The first one is delicious. The second one starts getting way too sweet and salty. Third one is overwhelming. By the fourth one, I can't eat it. It's way too sweet and salty. They're not terrible if you only eat one, but I won't buy them again. (It was SO sad for me when I decided that I didn't like these.)

Cold Brew Latte Dessert Bars

9/10. WOW. I love these. These are super light and refreshing after a day out or a delicious dessert after a heavy dinner. I'm taking off one point because the coffee flavor could be stronger. Overall, I 100% would buy again.

Almond Coconut Creamer

10/10. OK, I get this technically isn't a food, but I must rave about it. I love this creamer. It is so good. I have it in my coffee every day. I will never be sick of it. That's the review. It is just good. Please try it.

Matcha Green Tea Ice Cream

10/10. BOOM. Another full score. The matcha flavor is STRONG in this one. Not too sweet. Perfect. I love it. Also would buy again.

Vanilla Non-Dairy Frozen Dessert

1/10. Trader Joe's, I am sorry but this was not a good one. The coconut ice cream substitute is just not it. It's so greasy. After two spoons of it, my body couldn't handle the greasiness. It also doesn't pair well with espresso. Usually if you pour a little bit of espresso over your vanilla ice cream, it should taste immaculate, but this was terrible. Would not recommend it.

Philly Cheesesteak Baos

9/10. VERY PLEASANT SURPRISE! I really loved these. I got them as a joke because "Ha ha this is so silly. Philly cheesesteak baos? I'll try it just for fun." And wow. I really liked them. Very fun fusion twist on traditional Chinese baos. The flavor? Immaculate. The cheese with the bao? Amazing. TRY THEM!

Turmeric Ginger Coconut Beverage

4/10. *sigh* I trusted a certain Bay Area Youtuber (Emma Chamberlain) and bought this drink to give it a try. Ms Chamberlain hyped it up a lot, so I thought "Why not?" and gave it a try. I also thought the yellow was a really pretty color. Clearly I forgot that turmeric is best paired with savory foods. It does not work well with coconut milk. This being said, it wasn't so sad I had to dump the bottle. I finished it. It wasn't amazing. It wasn't disgusting. I just prefer turmeric in my curry, not my coconut milk.

Joe Joe's Slims

8/10. Yum. I like. These are good. I inhaled the entire pack in two days. I only take off two points because they do have a bit of a weird aftertaste that is different from their cousin, Oreos. Overall they pair well with a nice glass of milk or oat milk. I stress ate a lot of these while writing my comp gov paper. Anyway, I'll probably buy these again.

Chevre with Honey

10/10. Listen, I'm usually not a goat cheese fan. But this IS SO GOOD. The honey goes so well with the goat cheese. I like this cheese on the Trader Joe's crackers. SO GOOD. This cheese is also good on a slice of toasted ciabatta bread. Try it. You will love it.

Blueberry Lavender Almond Milk

9/10. Pleasantly surprised by this! One point off because it didn't wow me. It was great, but I wouldn't go out of my way to buy it again. The Lavender flavor is pretty strong. I made an iced latte with this and it turned out great. 2 shots of espresso, ice, blueberry lavender almond milk, and the coconut almond creamer I mentioned earlier. It's quite good!

Well, that concludes it. Like I said, it's been a great year writing about food. Big shoutout to Ella who has been editing my column. Ella is great. Also, shoutout to Juliana, who is the lovely human editing this column, as she is the new arts editor.

Stay rad, go try the things I recommended, and enjoy it with some friends and family. I hope my food column has made you feel warm and fuzzy inside. That is all. I will miss writing for you all. Goodbye! I love you all! Mwah!

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The Consequences of Tokenism

As more minorities are cast in media, the issue of representation continues to grow

Shrida Pandey | Online Head Section Editor

Media plays an important role in our society due to its ability to inform, entertain, and educate others. With a rise in calls for more representation in entertainment, problematic methods of casting such as tokenism are increasing, creating just as many problems as the poor representation itself.

Tokenism is the idea of only making a symbolic effort to include representation in order to portray a false sense of "equity" to viewers, and it continues to be harmful due to the inadequate portrayal of people of color as second-rate characters and their underrepresentation compared to their white counterparts.

As a child, I grew up watching shows with mainly white characters, and in the rare instances I saw characters that looked like me, they would be stereotyped into one type of role: smart. At the time, I soon realized that was how society would view me, and for the most part that continues to be how I'm viewed now.

However, as more awareness of racial equity spread, I had hoped that the characters I saw on screen would diversify. Instead, I continued seeing white main characters, while people that looked like me as well as other minorities are pushed aside.

Before someone claims that Hollywood has diversified compared to the past decade, I challenge you to go to a streaming service, scroll through their previews, and look for the diversity there. When I did it on Netflix, I found that 90 to 95 percent of shows continued to have white main characters.

The act of putting minorities in entertainment should be celebrated. It is crucial that all different people can see themselves accurately on the screen. The issue with tokenism arises when minorities are frequently cast as the side characters.

If you look at movies and TV shows that claim to have diversity there will almost always be a white heterosexual character as the main lead, while the minority is the "quirky" sidekick that has no plotline besides supporting the main character and at times playing into preconceived stereotypes.

One example of this is in "Emily in Paris", where there are only two non-white characters, Mindy and Julien, who are clearly there for diversity purposes, as they serve no actual purpose in the show besides being friends with the main white character.

What only makes this worse is that Mindy, who is Asian, is constantly making racist and stereotypical "jokes" about Chinese people. And not only is the actress playing Mindy, Korean, but the creator of "Emily in Paris" is white.

This type of representation, where people of color are used to make racist statements in the effort to please a white audience, is extremely troublesome and contributes to the stereotyping of minorities.

Another example of problematic representation comes from the teen drama, "Riverdale". Around the time of the Geroge Floyd protests, actress Vanessa Morgan, who plays one of the few minorities on the show, tweeted out a statement about her time playing her character on the show.

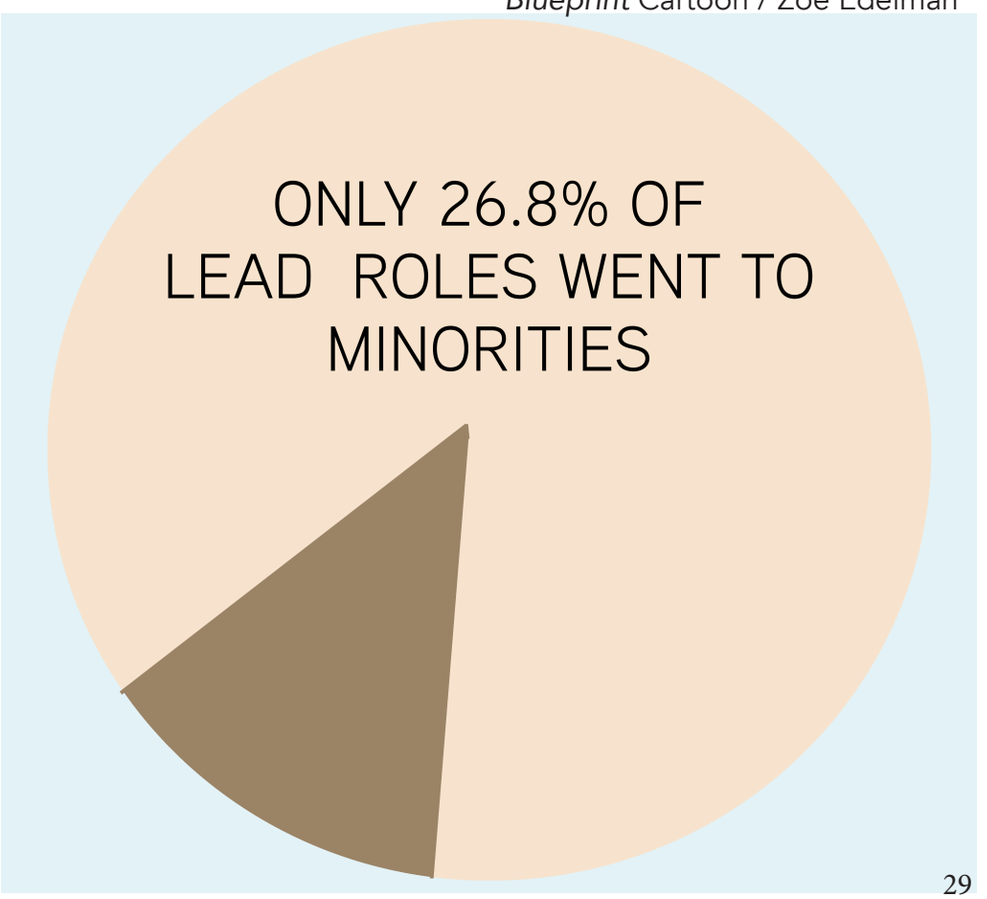
"Tired of how black people are portrayed in the media, tired of us being portrayed as thugs, dangerous and scary. Tired of us also being used as sidekick, non dimensional characters to our white leads...it starts with the media. I'm not being quiet anymore," Morgan stated.

Unfortunately, Morgan's experience is not unique, because it isn't the only time that this happens to people of color. In a study conducted by UCLA, researchers found that only 26.8 percent of lead roles went to minorities. So while movie producers and television directors can claim Hollywood is diversifying their roles, it is not.

I want to point out that in this article, I am mainly talking about the misrepresentation of people of color, but many other groups also face these issues. The LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities continue to be underrepresented, many times portrayed by people who do not even identify in the communities playing the characters.

Tokenism is an issue and it is important to understand the extent of its consequences. Next time you are watching a show, try looking at it closely and ask yourself if it has accurate representation. Not only if it has minority characters, but if it gives them plotlines and stories besides supporting the lead character.

Blueprint Cartoon / Zoe Edelman



Boys, We See Your Silence

It's time for men to speak out against sexual assault and harassment

Lyanne Wang | Feature Editor

On March 3, 2021, a man named Wayne Couzens kidnapped and later murdered a woman named Sarah Everard. When the news of Evarard's death flooded headlines a week later, I was neither an acquaintance who mourned the death of a friend nor a mother who grieved the loss of a daughter, but I was a girl, and that single connection bound me to a pang of misery that came with acknowledging what it means to be a girl in today's society. Only when I scrolled through social media did I find comfort in solidarity as I watched a countless number of women express their support for Everard and her family. However, as I continued to tap through Instagram stories I saw that each girl's cry for justice preceded only a boy's celebration of his favorite sports team, a renewed feeling of misery screamed to me that boys cared more about Stephen Curry's latest game than the issue of violence against women.

In a culture that enables sexual assault and harassment towards women, silence is complicity; boys must speak up and stand out against sexual violence for there to be any real shift in this perennial problem.

While most people wish for it to not be true, reality upholds that it is far more dangerous to be a woman today than a man. To deny this is to also ignore how most women cannot jog safely at night, cannot leave the house without pepper spray, and cannot even walk down a street alone with both earbuds plugged in.

Similarly, dismissing the issue of sexual violence means also brushing off the stories of women who survived sexual assault; it means turning a blind eye on the girl who was raped while walking to a local convenience store, the woman who was raped during a casual run around town, and the girl who was sexually abused while riding on a school bus with other students.

These were all real events, and these were only three victims out of millions.

According to Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, there are 433,648 victims, ages 12 or older, of rape and sexual assault in the United States each year.

Sexual violence impacts women on a day-to-day basis far more than it does men, so it makes sense that women have been the ones protesting, posting, and speaking up against it. However, when dealing with an issue of this immensity, men's support is a necessity for creating substantial change. Furthermore, men have to recognize that sexual violence is not solely a "woman's issue".

In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted a National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence survey which revealed that men made up 90 percent of perpetrators of sexual violence against female victims, and men were also 93 percent of perpetrators against male victims.

Men are majorly responsible for the sexual violence problem in America, so they must also take responsibility in becoming a part of its solution. It is important to recognize that boys can also be victims of sexual assault, but when the gender statistics of perpetrators are so disproportionate, we have to focus first on the 'bad' men rather than those who are victims.

Today, men have not yet taken up this responsibility, as the burden of solving sexual violence often seems to fall only on women. While the imbalance of effort in combating various forms of misogyny is not new, we now have the power to end men's silence on this topic by recognizing and dissolving the factors that first led to their silence.

For one, popular culture normalizes men's violence through movies, video games, and pornography, to the point where caring about women appears more as a weakness than a strength. Some people even fear that by standing up for women, they are losing a part of their masculinity or jeopardizing their place in the "men's club." As a result, many boys choose to pick their nails, shuffle their feet, and ultimately, look away during a situation in which they have the power to protect a woman.

However, inaction during necessary moments only continues the cycle of toxic masculinity. When men witness sexual harassment or assault and do not interfere, they are complacent with our flawed society, and they also send a message to male perpetrators that they are okay with their depraved behaviors.

On the flip side, when men do speak up, they make clear to both harassers and the people around them that they do not tolerate sexual violence. Taking a stride in standing up for women opens up space for more men to chime in, and that then promotes a safer, more comfortable environment for both men and women.

The second part of undoing a culture already acceptant of sexual violence is to understand how the issue remains existent in present-day America.

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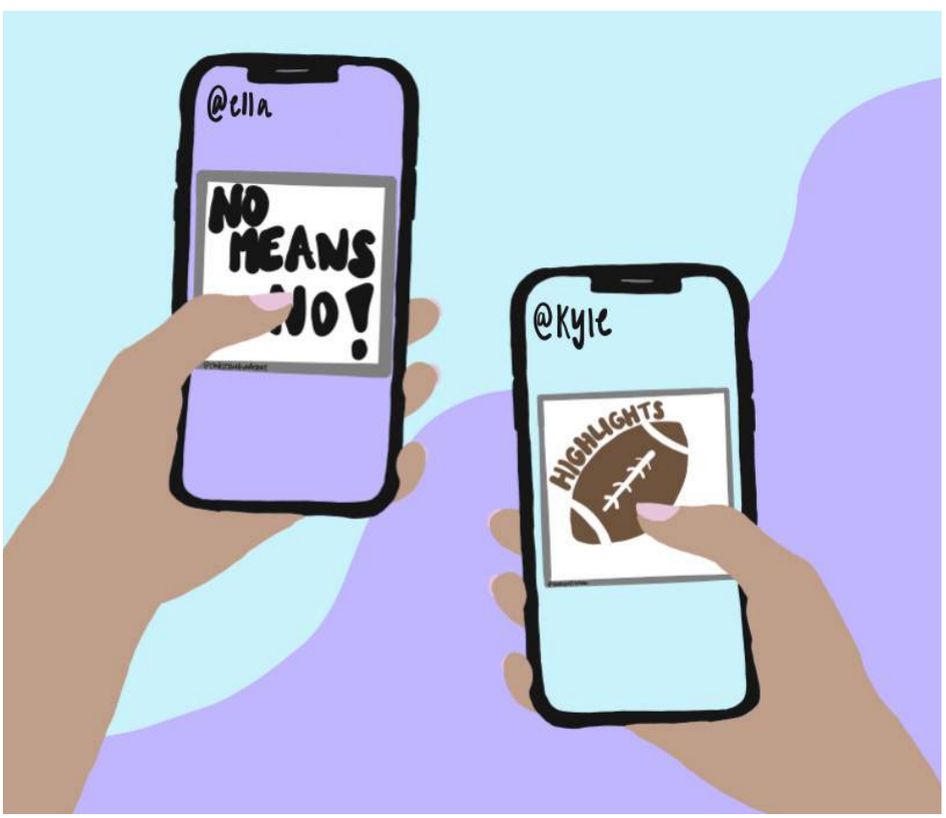

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Gun Control: It's Time for Action

How America's gun-loving culture fostered a problem we can no longer solve

Erin Hambidge | Opinion Editor

It is a new day in America, but the same story flashes across the news. Once again, an automatic weapon is responsible for the loss of countless lives. We mourn the victims and find solace in the petitions and protests flooding social media, but all too soon the fragile spark of hope is crushed when we wake up once more and find the story repeating with new names, faces, and the same automatic weapon.

While it may not be possible to remove the threat of existing automatic weaponry, increased licensing laws and background checks to regulate the circulation of automatic and semi-automatic weapons will reduce the threat of mass shootings and save lives.

Ever since the National Firearms Pact of 1934, America has heavily restricted the sale and manufacturing of automatic weapons. Beginning in 1986, it was illegal for new automatic weapons to be produced. However, all automatic weapons made before that year were grandfathered into the system, meaning there are around 630,000 automatic weapons currently circulating in the US according to federal data.

Buying an existing automatic weapon through the proper channels takes months and requires a federal background check, but unlicensed dealers can sell automatic weapons without requiring one at all. This loophole is extremely dangerous, as around 22 percent of US gun owners purchased their weapon without a background check (Giffords Law Center).

A common error regarding automatic weaponry is the difference between a semi-automatic weapon and a fully automatic weapon. Semi-automatic weapons can only fire one shot every time the trigger is pulled, making them a popular choice for citizens looking to protect themselves. Automatic weapons are military-grade guns capable of firing dozens of shots at a time. There is no justifiable reason to own one.

That said, as weaponry continues to develop, the line between semi-automatic and fully automatic weapons is blurring. AR-15s, dubbed "America's Rifle" by the National Rifle Association (NRA), are classified as a semi-automatic rifle even though manufacturers designed them to kill a large number of people. This makes them the weapon of choice for several of the deadliest mass shootings in America's history, such as the Parkland shooting that claimed 17 lives in 2018.

A reclassification of the AR-15 as a fully automatic weapon would halt its production and enforce strict background checks on people looking to purchase an existing rifle. Considering some states only require buyers of AR-15s to be 18 years old with a clean record, this action would take significant strides in reducing gun violence.

A concerning factor in the rise of mass shootings is that they appear to be tied to a trend of worsening mental health in the US. This narrative first emerged in 2012, after news outlets diagnosed Sandy Hook shooter Adam Lanza with schizophrenia in the days following the tragedy. Since then, organizations such as the NRA have employed mental health to excuse the violence caused by automatic weapons.

Not only is this harmful to many people suffering from mental illnesses, but it disregards much of the research that ties the motives of mass shootings to prejudices against a specific race, class, or community (PMC).

Even though it was not done with an automatic weapon, the recent Atlanta Spa Shooting provides an example of our deeply flawed system. The shooter purchased a handgun just hours before the shooting due to the limited background check requirements and zero wait time in place in Georgia. The tragedy that followed was a result of his prejudice against sex workers, not any existing mental illness. Despite that, Cherokee County sheriff's Captain Jay Baker callously dismissed his actions with the phrase, "he was having a bad day". Only when mental health serves to defend the shooter does it come into play, and even then, it is used to garner sympathy rather than hold our lenient gun laws accountable. Someone's 'bad day' should never justify the loss of life, but with easy access to advanced weaponry, mass shootings have become an outlet for the underlying hatred that exists in America.

I often hear the phrase "my constitutional right" used to defend owning an automatic weapon, which does not hold the same weight as it once may have. The Constitution remains an important framework for our governmental system, but the states ratified the document in a time of war where colonists lived in constant fear of invasion. It is not logical to hold our current laws regarding gun control to the standards of a time period with far less-advanced weaponry and extremely different societal conditions.

The Constitution is also not the irrefutable "law of the land" we make it out to be. When Thomas Jefferson, the most qualified scribe among the Founding Fathers, reviewed the document, he found an alarming amount of grammatical errors, most of them misplaced commas. The clause of the Second Amendment that now grants every American the right to own a gun was supposed to guarantee the right to bear arms under a well-regulated militia, not the right to bear arms at all. By the time Jefferson made the correct changes, the States had already received the Bill of Rights for ratification, cementing a future of devastating gun violence.

America's insistence on upholding a misguided sense of personal freedom through the exertion of the Second Amendment creates a culture where gun violence is not only tolerated, but normalized.

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Blueprint Cartoon / Zoe Edelman

I Have Beef With Beef

An insight into a vegetarian's mind

Zoe Edelman | Head Graphics

With the nuance of iPads, astronauts, and Sour Patch Kids, I find it hilarious and a bit rudimentary when people try to invalidate my diet by pointing out that the initial human hunter-gatherers ate meat. They also didn't wear shoes.

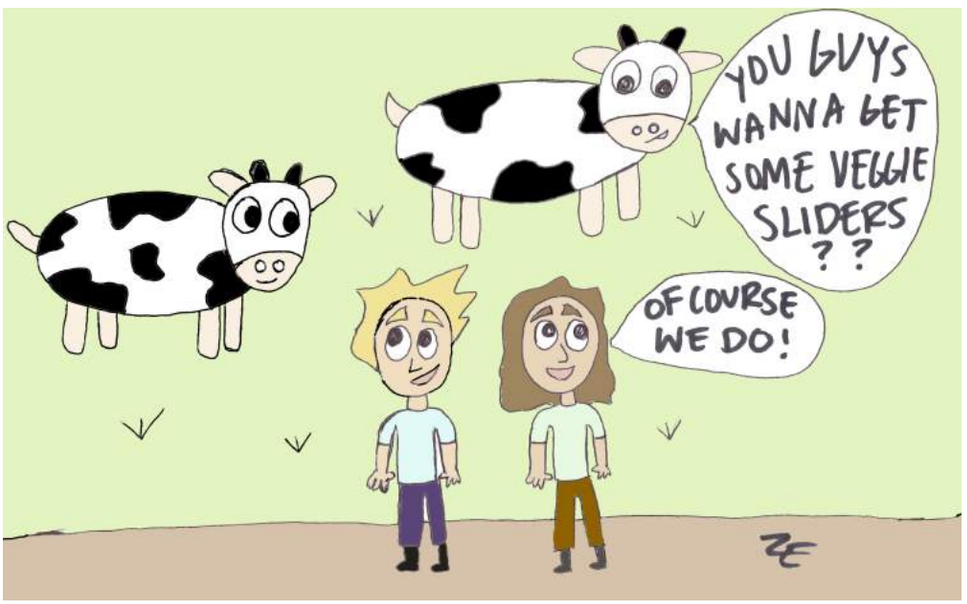
My peers snap to defend the flavor and historical relevance of meat to me before I even offer any insight into why I choose to be meat-free. And stigma is always the first obstacle, right? As soon as something is different from the majority, it becomes offensive. With the topic of being a vegetarian, I find it funny that a label about food can be jarring.

My intent when I bring up I'm a vegetarian is never malicious, and most of the time I will just politely decline a meat dish or bring an alternative to a barbeque without making any show of it.

However, I am going to provide my understanding of consuming meat and why I choose to opt out of it.

Eating meat is exchanging one life for one or more meals. Every time someone consumes meat, they take a life prematurely to satiate themselves. With the nuance of plant-based meat, vegan substitutes, and a plethora of vegetarian cookbooks, I see no reason as to why I need to take a life to provide myself with nutrients.

"But animals don't suffer like humans do." Actually, they do. I don't know where the misconception that animals can't suffer, feel pain, or terror came from. What's your reaction when you accidentally step on your dog's paw? Rushing to say sorry? Now talk to me again about animal pain. Where is that love for poultry in overpopulated, disease-infested environments with poor diets?



Blueprint Cartoon / Zoe Edelman

For the fish whose fins are cut off alive and suffocated? Why does the label of poultry desensitize us to abuse?

Next, let's talk efficiency. In order to have a hamburger, the cattle need land space to graze. Then, the cattle has to grow to adult size, be killed and manufactured to ground beef, and be transported to wherever it needs to go. Raising the cattle requires a large number of resources, as does the processing. Eating plant-based skips this process and a loss of life.

A veggie burger surpasses the trophic level of the cow, gaining efficiency in providing nutrients because energy is going directly from plants to people without the cow in-between. Because of this, more people could consume plant-based burgers instead of only a few people having beef burgers.

Now, let's touch on corruption, every social studies teacher's favorite word. As with everything else in society, the meat industry is corrupt. Corporations exploit workers with slave and other unsavory labor brought onto giant fishing boats to work cheaply and illegally. The people assigned to chop off chicken heads for a living? They could probably use some factory-funded therapy.

All this is just the tip of the melting ice caps. There's plenty of statistics, dieticians, and banana enthusiasts who could provide more fact-filled information on the benefits of a plant-based diet. But to recap: I do it for the animals, the planet, and mostly so I can sleep at night. We all decide our own moral code and how we choose to consume resources (to an extent. The more socioeconomic power someone holds, the more access they have to sustainable consumption). This is what works for me. I urge everyone to actively evaluate their passive and active consumption and make changes that align with their morality.

Thank you, and go have a vegetable, you're starting to look like one.

Boys on Sexual Assault

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In a Harvard Business Review article, Getting Men to Speak Up, author Michael S. Kimmel wrote that sexual harassment today generally persists due to three coexisting conditions: men's sense of privilege and power over women, the presumption that women are not going to fight back, and the expectation that other men will not call out sexual abusers.

With the recent surge in the Me Too movement and the outpour of twenty-first-century feminist movements, it is evident that women have been resisting sexual violence loud and clear.

Now, men must break down the third factor by dissolving complicit assent.

In a 2005 Access Hollywood tape, former President Donald Trump said, "I'm automatically attracted to beautiful women… I just start kissing them, it's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything."

To any person with a good conscience, Trump's words most likely evoked a sense of disgust and disagreement. Yet, Billy Bush, the show's host at the time, responded to Trump with a chuckle and said, "Whatever you want."

At that moment, Bush presumably thought he was simply engaging in harmless "locker room banter", but the conversation was anything but harmless. Bush's agreement only cemented Trump's belief that power and fame mean undeniable access to women. If Bush had said, "Donald, that's wrong," perhaps Trump would now have one less sexual misconduct allegation.

In taking the focus away from Trump, Bush's failure to discord also unveils the way he views the women in his own life. Even though very few men would wish ill behavior upon a woman they know, staying silent about sexual harassment is akin to allowing it to continue and possibly later on impact one's sister, girlfriend, mother, aunt, or daughter.

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Schools Need to Publicize their Financial Aid Programs for AP Courses

Limited funding for financial aid and poor communication harms students' education

Helen O'Neal | Online Shadow Editor

As spring comes to an end, it seems as though the sweet freedom of summer is just around the corner. The only barrier between school-weary students and vacation is a mountain of projects, finals, and Advanced Placement (AP) tests. Every May, over one million students across the country take AP tests in the hopes to complete their AP course and receive college credit.

The AP tests provided by the College Board seem to offer opportunities for students to take higher-level classes and attain college credit, while in reality, they increase the gap of opportunities between students in different public high schools due to overwhelming costs.

To understand the flaws of AP testing it is vital to understand the system behind it. College Board is a nonprofit academic organization that administers international programs and tests, including SAT, AP, and BigFuture. College Board claims to be "helping millions of students navigate the transition from high school to college each year" (College Board).

Like all public high school courses, AP classes are free, however, they come with other unavoidable costs. These costs include equipment and textbooks made by the College Board, which cost hundreds of dollars per copy. Teachers can choose to use newer edition books in their class, making it more difficult for students to find used, discounted books. Additionally, the AP test at the end of the course has a base cost of $95. This cost can increase depending on the district because schools have the option of requiring students to pay over ten dollars more to fund test administrators. As a result, a student's decision to take a few advanced courses can easily end up costing families hundreds of dollars.

The College Board offers financial aid options for lower-income students that qualify, reducing test costs to $62, which may be further reduced to $15 for students within the Acalanes Union High School District. Schools can also provide additional financial aid options if they have the funding for it. Acalanes provides financial aid to lower the cost of exams to $40 for students that are not eligible for the College Board's aid.

However, in most cases the College Board and Acalanes' financial aid opportunities are not publicized to students, meaning only the students that do their own research to find out about them receive the benefits.

At Acalanes, even some AP teachers and school counselors did not know about Acalanes' offerings for AP exam financial aid.

Furthermore, the College Board's financial aid programs require student initiative. The College Board requires AP coordinators to indicate which students are eligible for the financial aid before a certain due date.

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Boys on Sexual Assault

Continued from 32

More importantly, boys and men alike must remember that women are people, and their value and safety are not decided based on whether you know them or not.

It's imperative that boys respect all girls, not only the ones they care about or want attention from. The first step in doing so is to be more mindful about sexual violence, then to speak out against it both in public and in private to set an example for other men to follow.

According to RAINN, someone in America is sexually assaulted every 73 seconds, and one out of every six American women is a victim of an attempted or completed rape.

For decades, people accepted sexual assault as a norm in American culture, but when these extreme statistics lay right before our eyes, men need to acknowledge that sexual assault is a problem they can no longer view from the backseat.

One in six women are victims of sexual assault. These numbers are not just figures of a study; these are real people that we see and interact with every single day. Sexual violence is not a foreign issue, it's not a past issue, and it's not a minor issue.

Women play a central role in most of our lives, and they deserve more support in combating sexual violence. It is not their responsibility alone to address a problem that is rooted mostly in toxic male behavior.

In response to hearing this, some men may bring up the idea that "not all men are bad!" While this is true, and it is unfair to categorize all men as harassers or even someone who enables sexual harassment, the "not all men" mindset is an extremely harmful one that arises more as a defense than an attempt at providing relief.

If someone tells you that a certain species of bees may sting you at any moment or location, and they add that nine out of ten of that species of bees have red wings, you will most likely avoid every single bee that has red wings from that moment on.

The problem with men and sexual assault are the same.

Men need to shift their mindset about sexual assault and begin calling out 'bad' men rather than trying to excuse themself from being one. There is no significance or progress if a man considers themself to be 'good' or 'unlike the others' but does not take any action to back that up.

Let me make it clear, this is not an attempt to bash the shortcomings of the entire male population. I believe that most men support and hope to help women but are simply unsure of how to do it.

In a 2004 Department of Justice study, it was found that only eight percent of rape education and prevention programs were designed specifically for men.

The unproportionate distribution of resources displays how, in the past, the public viewed rape as a women's issue as opposed to men's. Even though such beliefs have been present for decades, they are also not permanent in any way.

In a study done at the University of New Hampshire, 38 percent of men who enrolled in a bystander intervention course later reported having intervened in a situation that could have led to violence. Conversely, out of the men who did not enroll in the intervention course, only 12 percent of men later reported having intervened.

When men proactively work to remove themselves from America's long-withstanding misogynistic culture, sexual violence decreases. No matter how uncomfortable it may be to do so, the research supports that, in the end, people's views and knowledge about sexual assault are fluid and can change with effort and education.

AP Testing

Continued from 33

If students hesitate about taking AP courses due to costs, they can lose the opportunity to experience a college-level course on a topic that they are truly passionate about. AP provides teachers with additional free and paid teaching resources and professional development (College Board), as well as video and test preparation resources for students for each specific course. Students will miss out on opportunities for those additional resources as well.

Although it is registered as a non-profit organization, the College Board makes over $1 billion in revenue annually since 2017, according to ProPublica. So, why is more financial aid not being offered to students? The answer comes down to a simple fact: the College Board is a business that profits off of the stress and competition it fosters in students.

It is crucial for all students, regardless of their family's financial situation, to be aware of the College Board and their own school's financial aid opportunities. In Lafayette, many students are fortunate enough to not have to seek financial assistance; however, this luxury does not extend to students in different districts, and some students within our own community. While the Lamorinda area is affluent, it does not mean that our district schools can excuse advertising financial aid opportunities.

Blueprint Photo / Julia Poole

Gun Control

Continued from 31

Gun ownership is so ingrained into the fabric of our society that, according to Pew Research center, one in seven Americans have fired a gun in their lifetime. In addition to that startling high number, 44 percent of US adults, "personally know someone who has been shot, either accidentally or intentionally," (Pew Research Center).

With that in mind, it is no surprise that gun control filters into our political systems, creating polarizing views that dominate topics of debate and policy. Views on gun control vary, but as mass shootings continue to grow more frequent, the divide has only grown, to the point where political affiliation seems to trump the basic human compassion that should bring us together in times of tragedy.

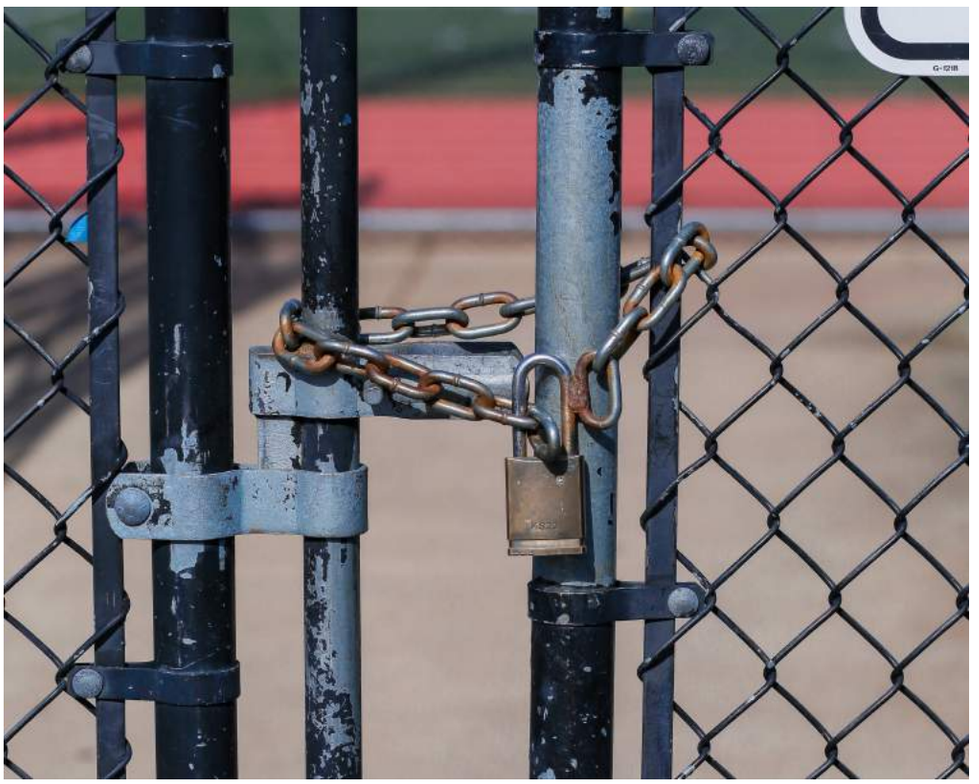
When we confine the issue of gun control to a world of campaigns, speeches, and carefully crafted tweets, it is easy to pretend that gun violence only exists in the news headlines. It is easy to forget that in 2019, there were more mass shootings in the US than there were days in a year (CBS News).

But I am reminded because I am a student. Because I am an American. Because I have grown up in a country where generations of tolerance for guns have passed younger generations a fear of them. The same story repeats, but it does not have to. It is time to set aside petty political views and accept that without change, we are complicit in creating a country where gun violence is not only normalized, but accepted.

States Move to Limit Transgender Rights

A new set of bills are sweeping the country, banning transgender people from participating in sports of their gender

Irene Meklin | Copy Editor



Blueprint Photo/Lue Van Handel

Transgender visibility has been on the rise in recent years. While this trend is positive for transgender individuals, it has also led to the rise of bills attempting to restrict transgender athletes from participating in competitive sports.

Transgender participation in sports has become a controversial issue in recent months. With this increased attention, nearly half of all state legislatures have passed bills to prohibit transgender people, usually transgender women, from playing on sports teams of their gender.

Transgender athletes have persevered through challenges and hardship for decades. On Aug. 16, 1977, a transgender woman named Reneé Richards won the right to compete in the women's US Open tennis tournament. The case marked a victory for transgender women across the country, and it set a precedent for similar cases across many different sports.

In 2003, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) ruled that transgender men and women could compete on sports teams of their gender if they underwent a form of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for a length of time determined by a physician. After 18 years, this protocol is still in use in the Olympics.

Hormone replacement therapy, commonly known as HRT, is a medical process in which transgender people undergo puberty of their gender through injection or pills of estrogen or testosterone. Several athletic institutions require this process to occur for transgender athletes to participate.

Throughout most of 2020 and part of 2021, bills legislating against transgender people participating in their gender's sports teams have spread across the country. Beginning on March 16, 2020, in Idaho, state legislatures across the country have passed bills restricting transgender athletes from participating in sports. Since then, legislatures have passed bills in Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas, and an increasing number of other states.

These bills vary in their details, but they generally entail forcing transgender women and girls to play on men's sports teams. In several states, these bills allow transgender men and boys to play on either team.

"They're forcing [transgender people] to become someone they don't want to be," freshman Nicole Parlett said. "It is kind of just forcing people into something they don't really want and could affect their self-image and what they think of themselves."

The argument proposed by politicians pushing these bills across the country is that transgender women will dominate women's sports because of their physical advantages based on their biological sex. This legislation seeks to eliminate these advantages by grouping transgender women and girls with cisgender men and boys.

Idaho Gov. Brad Little, one of the proponents of the first such bill that passed in March 2020, says that he signed the bill because he's worried about "girl's right to participate without having to be concerned about who they're competing with."

These bills disregard the fact that HRT can 'level the playing field' between transgender women and cisgender women, as has been proven through multiple scientific studies. Transgender men are shown to exhibit similar levels of strength and endurance as cisgender men after taking HRT for at least half a year.

Anti-transgender bills can also impact cisgender students. One bill recently passed in the Florida House, known as HB 1475, states that if a parent complains that a student on a girls' sports team is 'too androgynous', a doctor or a school nurse would test the student for their biological sex. This would happen either through physical examination of their genitals or through a test of their levels of testosterone. Thus, gender-nonconforming cisgender women and girls would undergo the same scrutiny as transgender women and girls.

Many students at Acalanes feel that constraining transgender athletes to the sports team of their biological sex is unjust.

"I think it should be up to the players' choice, to see if they want to be on the men's team or the women's team or whatever team. It shouldn't be based on their testosterone levels," sophomore Andrew Zheng said.

These anti-transgender bills have expanded beyond the sports field. In Texas, for instance,

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Announcing Reflection: The Highlight of my High School Career

Announcing athletic events was an experience I won't forget

Noah Glosson | Staff Writer

Blueprint Photo/Mara Korzeniowska

I remember it as clear as day. The Acalanes varsity football team lined up at the Las Lomas 17-yard line with 12 seconds remaining in the game on Saturday, March 20, 2021. I nervously clenched the microphone in my hands as I saw the teams tied at 28. Senior running back Nic Rossi took the handoff, cut inside, bounced off a defender, and marched into the endzone. The crowd erupted into a frenzy as the Dons defeated Las Lomas 35-28 for the first time since 2015. That was a moment to remember.

Since freshman year, I have announced over 200 hours of football, lacrosse, basketball, baseball, and soccer. Because of this, people have coined me the "The Voice of the Dons." Football is my favorite sport to announce, but basketball is a close second.

I always liked post analytics. Back in middle school, I wrote about sporting events and thought about making thrilling calls. This was a hobby that I wanted to pursue in high school. Sadly, I had no idea how.

When I was a freshman, my sister approached me about Randall Takahashi, a math teacher and the athletic director of the school. Knowing my interest in sports, she said Takahashi could offer me a job announcing athletic events. I met with Takahashi the following day so that I could file paperwork and begin my announcing tenure. This became a defining moment in my high school career.

I remember announcing one-quarter of a freshman game and feeling confident in my abilities. My confidence decreased after I faltered on an emergency action plan, an announcement to ensure the safety of attendees, players, and officials in case of an emergency. I knew I had a long way to go.

Being an announcer in front of hundreds of people is not an easy task. It requires confidence, timing, fluency when speaking, great attention to detail, and drive. Getting distracted is easy, which makes one susceptible to miss an exciting play.

I remember my first error was mistaking the receiver who caught a touchdown pass in a freshman game for another player. It happened in Oct. 2017 and was my first game. Being in the booth can be nerve-wracking, but as time goes on it becomes easier and more comfortable.

Announcing in front of a full crowd, whether it be football or basketball, is always a special experience for me. I remember when the crowd erupted and students stormed the field following the varsity football team's win over Campolindo in 2019. Being the voice of the Dons allowed me to control the energy in the stadium, and it's a surreal experience.

I wouldn't change anything about these past four years. It was an absolute pleasure being the "Voice of the Dons" since my freshman year. I would like to extend my thanks to Randy Takahashi, Holly Thompson, Dave Gannon, Matt Delaney, Bob Barter, and my family for all their support over the years. This is without a doubt the highlight of my high school career.

While I am uncertain about my future plans, public address announcements will surely be part of my upcoming endeavors. Thank you for everything!

Noah Glosson
Voice of the Dons 2017-2021

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Junior Varsity Football Team Plays a Game for the Ages

The junior varsity football team defeats Miramonte with only 14 eligible players due to COVID-19 restrictions

Brendan Connelly | Online News Editor

For almost a year, the Acalanes Football program has practiced following strict COVID-19 guidelines. The extremely delayed season kicked off this March, and the team immediately had to adapt to a health situation that flipped their game plan upside-down.

The Acalanes junior varsity football team defeated Miramonte on Friday, April 9, with only 14 eligible players on the roster, as a result of a recent COVID-19 exposure throughout part of the team.

The impressive win is a testament to the team's hard work and dedication to the game throughout shelter-in-place.

"The team worked so hard, lifting weights, core development, footwork, team timing. We weren't sure if we were ever going to have a season, but, you never knew that from the team's enthusiasm. The preparation and hard work ultimately paid off when we started the season. We were much better prepared than any of our competition," Coach Greg Young said.

However, the team rarely practiced with all of their players in attendance at once.

"Over the past year, we luckily had a six week, fully padded season with practices with our whole team. Before that, we had pods of our similar position practicing with around 10 max people, without pads for about seven to eight months," sophomore and JV football player Victor Nicolacakis said.

Shortly before the game against Miramonte, a COVID-19 exposure forced many starters on the team to quarantine.

"We had lost three of our top defenders, including our two starting middle linebackers, three starting receivers, our running back, center & quarterback," Young said.

Despite this difficult situation, the players managed to come together and win. They knew that their hard work put in over the past year would pay off.

"I expected that we would win the game. I knew that it would be really difficult to win with how few people we had, however, I believed in my brothers and they believed in each other as well, so I believe this bond and hard work allowed us to win against Miramonte," sophomore and JV football player Zach Robb said.

The game itself was relatively low scoring, ending in a 14 to 6 Dons victory.

"Obviously, with the limited numbers we had, any sort of win is a win. Our two scores were from one, a long drive of great running by Ben Foox, behind our line, and two, a miracle pick-six from Nathan Bennett," Nicolacakis said.

The lack of key position players forced some of the eligible players to learn new positions in a short period of time. Sophomore Nathan Bennett usually plays outside linebacker for the junior varsity team, but he played cornerback against Miramonte, scoring one of the two Acalanes touchdowns on the aforementioned pick-six.

"Winning the game was probably the best feeling I've had all year. After how much we had to deal with, it felt so amazing," Bennett said.

Overall, the junior varsity team worked exceptionally hard throughout the season and made the best of the situation COVID-19 continuously put the team in.

"I want to express my thankfulness to the parents for bargaining for a season to happen, and the coaches who kept the summer camps going through the fall and winter in hopes of keeping us prepared for a possible season. They gave up so much for us this year and it proved all worth it after finishing with our undefeated record," Nicolacakis said.

Transgender Rights

Comtimued from 35

SB 1646 would label parents and medical professionals that consent to the administration of puberty blockers, HRT, or surgeries to those under the age of 18 as child abusers. SB 1311, another bill in Texas, would prevent liability insurance coverage of transition-related care.

The rise of anti-transgender bills has many across the nation worried about the consequences. In response, some are beginning to protest against the bills, and the videos of their speeches have gone viral across social media.

Several organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) plan to challenge some of these bills across the country, one being HB 1570, which prevents health professionals from recommending transition-related care to those under 18.

"This is a sad day for Arkansas, but this fight is not over—and we're in it for the long haul," ACLU of Arkansas executive director Holly Dickinson said in a statement to the public. "We are committed to doing all we can to support these families and ensure they know how to continue to fight for their rights and get the care and resources they need."

More than 30 states have passed or are trying to pass these 'trans bans'. There have been no such bills proposed in California, and it appears that there will be no such bans in the foreseeable future, whether on a state-wide or local level.

"We're a very welcoming community and a very welcoming school," junior Sheridan Perlman said. "To put such bans on a school so welcoming and such a tight-knit community, I don't think it's a good look for our school and I don't think it's necessary."

The March Madness Gender Divide

The NCAA is under fire after evidence of inequality between men's and women's treatment at March Madness surfaces

Daniel Adri, Kyle Bielawski, and Miller Smith | Liason Editor and Staff Writers

Sexism in sports has been a topic of great importance in the twenty-first century, as female athletes around the world stand up for their rights and demand equality.

After pictures of the women's weight room and meal service at the 2021 March Madness tournament in Indianapolis spread throughout social media, a wave of backlash hit the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for the way they treated their female athletes.

Male athletes at this year's tournament received a multi-thousand dollar weight room consisting of squat racks, weight machines, numerous dumbbell racks, and other advanced equipment. Female athletes, on the other hand, received weights, but nothing like what the NCAA provided the men. They were merely given a rack of dumbbells and a stack of yoga mats.

The issue was first brought to public attention when a Tik Tok posted by Sedona Prince accumulated over 11 million views. Prince plays the forward position for the University of Oregon women's basketball team, and in her video, she displayed the differences between the men's and women's accommodations at the tournament.

Blueprint Graphic/Arlyne Noguera

"I was disgusted, but not surprised. I understand that the men's NCAA tournament produces more money than the women's tournament, but that being said there comes a certain level of respect that should be given to female athletes. Only giving them yoga mats and super light weights is almost belittling female athletes who work so hard to be in what is the most competitive tournament of their season," Acalanes graduate and current Iowa State softball player Kaylee Pond said.

The NCAA released a statement regarding the issue, claiming that the lack of weights was a result of "limited space." This statement didn't change the public's viewpoint on the issue.

Soon after the NCAA released their statement, more videos of the women's weight rooms hit social media, showing that the women's weight room had enough room for the same weights as the men. This attempt to cover up the unequal treatment between the two tournaments sparked even more controversy.

"When I first heard about the NCAA women's weight rooms being limited compared to the men's, I thought of one or two fewer bench presses, fewer leg presses, nothing substantial. Then I saw the photos. The men's weight room was a proper gym. Barbells, squat machines, lots of room. While the women received one barbell rack. It was so absurd I thought it was a joke at first. I was so frustrated and appalled at the fact that this could happen on the biggest stage of college basketball," sophomore Landon Santos said.

Many athletes at Acalanes feel the same way and have ideas of how to stop this from happening again.

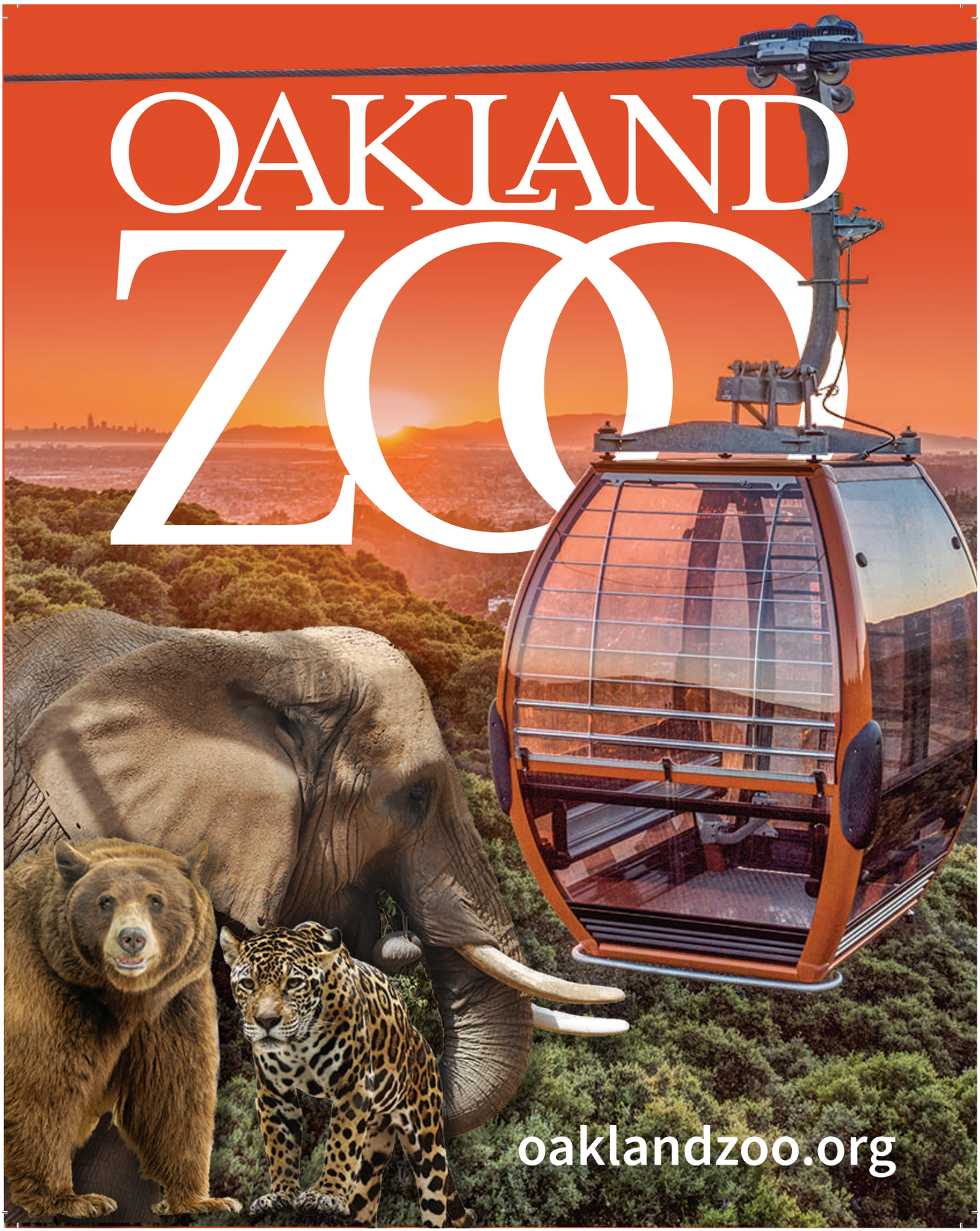
"I think in order to prevent this in the future, we can make sure to have representatives for women and men on both sides, someone who can vouch for the women or anyone who doesn't feel their needs are being met. The fact that anyone let this slide is outrageous," freshman Jenna Stelle said.

Outside of the tournament, sexism in sports is visible globally.

"Softball brings in the most revenue behind football, men's basketball, and then baseball... at some of the schools we have traveled to there has been a huge difference between the facilities [of] the baseball and softball teams. I remember we played at St. Louis and the baseball team had a huge warehouse with at least 8 cages while the softball team had only two outdoor cages with holes in the nets, and not even turf for the ground," Pond said.

The gender discrimination seen in Indianapolis this year extends far beyond basketball, and an issue like this can only be solved with the help of everyone.

"I think this inequality in basketball definitely represents inequalities around the world. There are so many countries where girls don't even have the option to play basketball or any sports, solely based on their gender and what they are expected to do based on the fact that they are a woman," Stelle said.


OAKLAND
ZOO
oaklandzoo.org

Varsity Athletics Season Progression (as of May 2)

Football
5-1 Record
Season Complete

Men's Basketball
2-2 Record
Game to Watch: May 8
at Home vs Pittsburg

Women's Basketball
0-0 Record
Season Delayed Due to COVID

Men's Soccer
3-5-2 Record
Season Complete

Women's Soccer
1-2-1
Game to Watch: May 11
at Home vs Alhambra

Women's Lacrosse
7-6 Record
Season Complete

Men's Lacrosse
1-3 Record
Game to Watch: May 27
(Senior Night) at Home
vs Las Lomas

Women's Water Polo
6-1 Record
Game to Watch: May 12
at Home vs Campolindo

Men's Water Polo
1-3 Record
Game to Watch: May 8
at Home vs Monte Vista

Swimming
Season Complete

Men's Tennis
3-3 Record
Season Complete

Women's Tennis
2-0 Record
Game to Watch: May 6
at Miramonte

Softball
11-6 Record
Season Complete

Baseball
5-4 Record
Game to Watch: May 13
at Campolindo

Wrestling
First Match: May 5

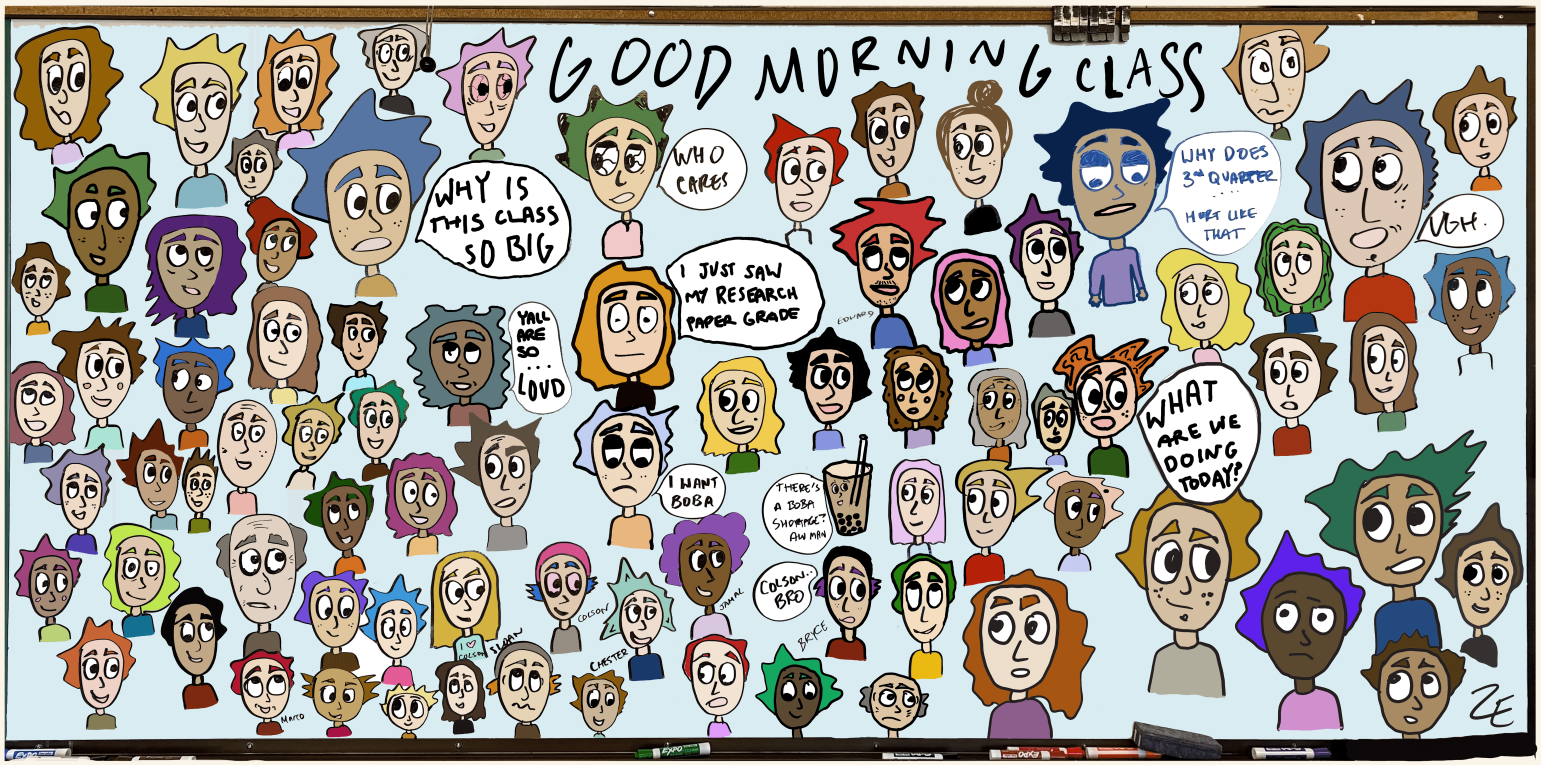
Track & Field
Season Complete
Achievement: New School Record for the Distance Medley Relay, 10:30:19

Cross Country
2-1 Record
Season Complete

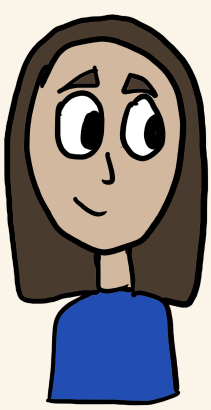
Men's Volleyball
1-1 Record
Game to Watch: May 20
at Campolindo

Women's Volleyball
0-2 Record
Game to Watch: May 20
at Campolindo

SAN FRANCISCO BAY.COFFEE
EST. 1979
A ROGERS FAMILY COMPANY



DANG, I GUESS WE'RE GRADS?
CONGRATS CLASS OF 21!!!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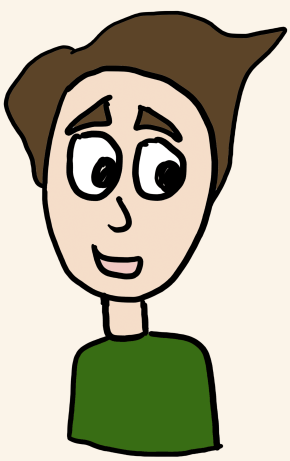
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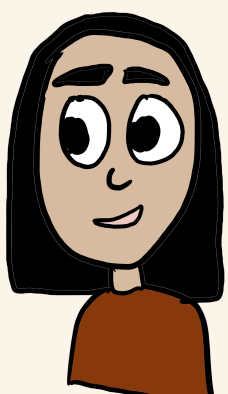
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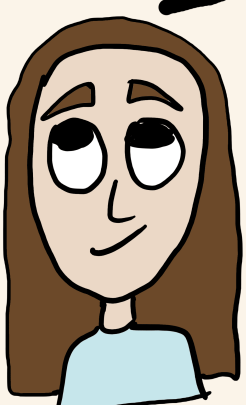
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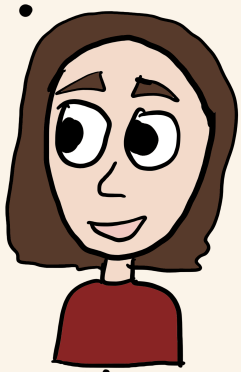
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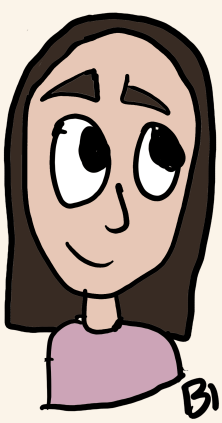
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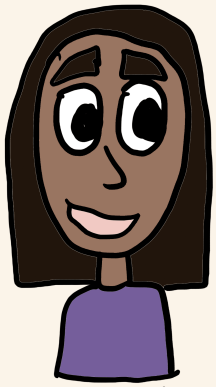
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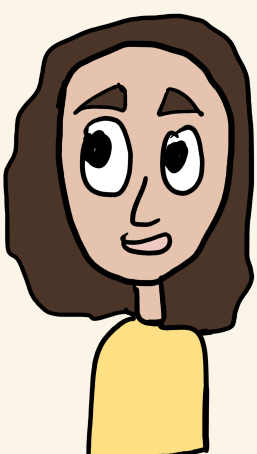
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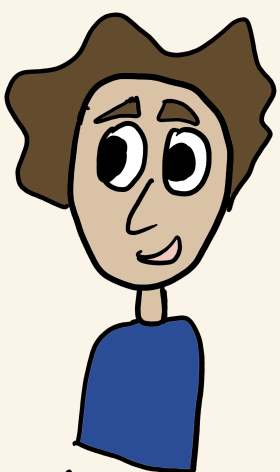
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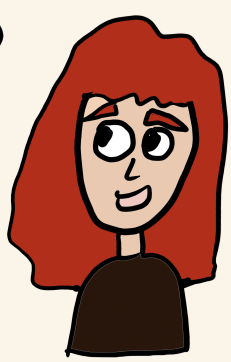
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average student debt
upon graduation
We're in this
TOGETHER.